

# Disciples and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark : a Study of Mark 10:23-31 in Relation to the Concept of Discipleship in the Markan Narrative

Author: Jonas D. Christal

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2473>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2011

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

**DISCIPLES AND DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

A study of Mark 10:23-31 in relation to the concept of discipleship in the Markan narrative

**Thesis**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree**

**from the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Weston Jesuit)**

By: Jonas D. Christal

Directed by: Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.

Second Reader: Thomas D. Stegman, S.J.

Spring, 2011

*Aos meus pais, Alcides e Ivone.*

## CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
 <b>CHAPTER I - Discipleship in Mark 10:23-31 and its relation to other Markan texts .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Exegesis of Mark 10:23-31 .....	8
2. Comparison to other Markan passages regarding exemplary discipleship .....	31
 <b>CHAPTER II - Markan Discipleship in Modern Scholarship .....</b>	<b>38</b>
1. Locating the discussion on discipleship in the context of Markan studies .....	39
2. Narrative approaches to the disciples and discipleship in Mark .....	42
3. The place and the teaching of Mark 10:23-31 in the overall Markan narrative .....	55
 <b>CHAPTER III - Markan Discipleship in Relation to other Contexts .....</b>	<b>59</b>
1. Discipleship in the context of the Markan community .....	59
2. The teaching of Mark 10:23-31 in relation to Matthew 19:23-30 and Luke 18:24-30. ....	64
3. Theological issues regarding Mark 10:23-31 and the costs and rewards of discipleship. ....	69
4. Some conclusions for Christian life. ....	75
 <b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>85</b>

## INTRODUCTION

After studying the Gospel of Mark mostly from a historical approach, focusing on the world behind the text, scholars have turned more recently to the text as it is available for us today, taking into consideration the development of the Gospel narrative, how the story is told, and making use of literary theories to unlock the message of the Gospel. This approach, however, usually ends up with a strikingly negative view of the disciples who fail to understand Jesus and abandon him during his arrest, trial, and death. Is the author's view of the disciples hopelessly negative? How is the reader/listener expected to respond to the challenges posed by Mark's Gospel regarding discipleship?

This thesis argues that, by presenting two contrasting responses to Jesus' call to discipleship, namely the rich man's and the disciples', Mark gives the reader/listener a rather positive image of discipleship in 10:17-31, juxtaposing it to an overall negative view of the disciples developed in much of the narrative, and stresses *renunciation of possessions* as an essential requirement for true discipleship.

Often times, Christians today use the concept of discipleship loosely without being aware of its different nuances and complexity. For sure, the Gospel authors develop the concept differently. Therefore, in order to have a better understanding of the notion of discipleship, it is necessary to turn to the Gospels and study the way in which the concept is elaborated and how the authors want their readers/listeners to understand it. An analysis of how the Second Gospel develops this concept becomes then a crucial endeavor. In a good story all the characters and every single episode contribute to the development of the drama. Similarly, in the Gospel, each

pericope is an important part of the overall narrative. By focusing on one pericope (Mark 10:23-31) and its relation with the overall Markan narrative, this study aims to shed more light on this fundamental discussion, hoping to make more explicit the core meaning and demands of Christian discipleship in the world today.

The first chapter will do an exegesis of Mark 10:23-31, analyzing its internal structure, how the pericope is developed, its key words and concepts, and the points of contention. This study will prioritize the Greek text and employ textual, grammatical, and lexical analysis in order to determine more closely the meaning intended by the author for this particular passage. In addition, Mark 10:23-31 will be compared to other pericopes in the narrative which present similar elements, i.e., signals of exemplary discipleship. Here the hope is to find some connecting points and recurring themes in the narrative. The exegetical work and the comparison to other Markan passages will seek, respectively, to determine how 10:23-31 should be read and how it interacts with other similar texts.

The second chapter will be dedicated to studying Mark's concept of discipleship in the context of modern scholarship. First, it will locate the discussion on discipleship in the context of Markan studies in light of more recent studies. Second, it will analyze Markan discipleship primarily from a literary perspective, focusing the study on the narrative and its relationship with the reader/listener. Third, this study will investigate the place and the teaching of Mark 10:23-31 in the overall Markan narrative. It will seek to clarify how this pericope, by presenting a positive view of the disciples, serves to balance the overall negative image of the disciples in the narrative, and to set a strong message for the need of all disciples to practice *renunciation of possessions* to be a follower of Jesus.

The aim of the third chapter is to discuss Mark 10:23-31 and Markan discipleship in a wider dimension, seeking more light from other perspectives. First, it will locate the discussion of discipleship in the context of the Markan community, seeking to determine the *Sitz im Leben* of the community of Mark, and how its first readers/listeners were expected to respond to its teaching. Second, in the hope of finding how the other Gospel writers dealt with this passage, this study will turn to its corresponding texts in Matthew (19:23-30), and Luke (18:24-30). Third, it will pursue the major theological issues regarding 10:23-31 and the cost and rewards of discipleship in Mark. Finally the chapter will draw some conclusions for Christian life today, seeking the actualization of the teaching of Mark 10:23-31 and the overall demands and rewards of discipleship in Mark.

A final conclusion will then be offered and will include the findings of the study, an evaluation of the work proposed, and other elements that may need further investigation and clarification.

## CHAPTER I

### Discipleship in Mark 10:23-31 and its relation to other Markan texts

Since the goal of this thesis is to study Mark 10:23-31 in relation to the theme of discipleship developed in the Markan narrative, the first chapter will examine its internal construction, structure, and development. The hope is that this exegetical work on the Greek text, dealing with issues of text and redaction criticism, will illuminate the meaning of this passage and its place in the larger Markan narrative. Moreover, the second part of the chapter will relate 10:23-31 to other Markan texts that convey positive responses to the call of discipleship and feature some sort of renunciation of possessions.

In general, Markan scholars agree that 10:23-31 belongs to a large section that deals with the theme of discipleship (8:22-10:52). This theme is developed in relation to the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Some scholars include in this section the two healing stories of blind men (8:22-26 and 10:46-52), which function as a sort of framework of the section or as transitional stories. Correspondingly, these stories provide an introduction to and a summing-up of the teaching on discipleship.

In Mark 8:22-10:52, the three passion predictions followed by the disciples' misunderstandings give Jesus the opportunity to teach them, and most importantly, the audience of Mark's Gospel,<sup>1</sup> about the true nature and the costs of discipleship. While earlier in the story the disciples had already shown some signs of misunderstanding Jesus (4:1-20, 37-41; 4:40-41; 6:52), now, after three consecutive failures to grasp the deeper meaning of his *messiahship*, the

---

<sup>1</sup> I speak of Mark's audience in terms that Malbon conveys, including both "hearers and readers, with the accent on those who hear." See Elizabeth S. Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002), 5.



disciples are told respectively three times about the demands of following him. Whereas the preceding stories reveal some signs of confusion on the part of the disciples, this section makes their misconceptions evident and shows Jesus directly addressing the disciples' difficulties in understanding him: his true identity and mission.

Moreover, 8:22-10:52 is clearly oriented towards the decisive moment of Jesus' life, i.e., his passion and resurrection, which will take place in Jerusalem. Mark speaks of Jesus being ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ (8:27; 9:33; 10:32; 10:52) to Jerusalem. Following Jesus requires being on the same path (cf. 8:34-35). Jesus makes very clear where this road will eventually lead: to his suffering, death, and resurrection. During the journey, he explains to the unwilling disciples the why of his life and death: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45). This saying becomes a key to understanding Jesus' identity as well as what his discipleship entails.

### **1. Exegesis of Mark 10:23-31**

Mark 10:23-31 belongs to a larger passage that begins with the story of the encounter of a rich man with Jesus (10:17-22). As a whole, the passage deals directly with the issue of discipleship and the proper response to Jesus. The question of renunciation of wealth as a requirement to follow Jesus appears in the first part of the passage and is further developed in the following verses. Indicating the many similarities with Mark's earlier "call stories" (1:16-20; 2:13-17; 3:13-19; 6:7-13), Dennis M. Sweetland sees Jesus' encounter with the rich man as a call story.<sup>2</sup> As Jesus has called Levi (2:14), he summons the rich man, saying in the imperative form,

---

<sup>2</sup> According to Sweetland, here as in other "call stories," (1) Jesus explicitly invites the person (2) to form a sole relationship with himself. (3) The call is made as Jesus is on a journey and (4) the person being called needs to leave

ἀκολουθεῖ μοι (10:21). Unlike Levi and the other first disciples who left everything behind and followed Jesus, the rich man does not respond in the same way. Jesus sees a failure here. Thus, Mark's audience becomes aware of the fact that Jesus' call is not an imperative that is automatically fulfilled but an invitation that can be refused.

Subsequently, in vv. 23-27, Jesus reflects on the question of wealth and discipleship and, after Peter's intervention, he comments on the fact that the disciples have left everything and followed him (vv. 28-31). The disciples' apt response to Jesus' call, placed side by side with the rich man's refusal, offers a rare positive picture of the disciples in Mark. What role does the demand of renunciation of wealth play in 10:23-31 and the whole narrative of the Second Gospel? Is it a key element for true discipleship? What is the purpose of this positive picture of the disciples considering their overall negative image in the narrative?

Focusing his textual and redaction analysis on 10:25, Ernest Best splits 10:17-31 into three sections (vv. 17-22; vv. 23-27; and vv. 28-31) and affirms that vv. 23-27 and 28-31 are later Markan additions to the story of the rich man (vv. 17-22).<sup>3</sup> Taking into consideration Best's division and arguments, we now turn to the text of Mark 10:23-31.

23 Καὶ περιβλεψάμενος ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ· πῶς δυσκόλως οἱ τὰ χρήματα ἔχοντες εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελεύσονται.<sup>4</sup>

*And looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God."*

---

everything behind and follow him. See Dennis M. Sweetland, *Our Journey with Jesus: Discipleship According to Mark* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 17-30.

<sup>4</sup> After the Greek text, I provide my own translation in English. The Greek text is from *The Greek New Testament*, eds. Barbara Aland and others, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001).

John Donahue and Daniel Harrington observe that here as in earlier passages Jesus teaches his disciples privately after a public event (cf. 4:10-12; 7:17-23; and 10:10-12).<sup>5</sup> The use of περιβλεπόμενος serves to create a new scenario for Jesus' teaching. The narrative swiftly changes from the interaction between the rich man and Jesus to Jesus and his disciples. Even though some scholars consider v. 23 as an older independent logion, Adela Yarbro Collins points out Mark's careful redactional work, making the link of this verse with the preceding scene, "As he looked intently (ἐμβλέψας) at the man who had run up to him (v. 21), now he looks around (περιβλεπόμενος) at his disciples."<sup>6</sup> The verbal link also serves to contrast the two sections. Moreover, as in earlier passages, περιβλεπόμενος also helps to intensify what Jesus is about to deliver (cf. 3:5 and 3:34). Furthermore, as the story now centers on the disciples, it makes a direct connection to Mark's first audience, probably mostly Christians.<sup>7</sup> It further elucidates to them the demands and consequences of following Jesus.

The adverb δυσκόλως is rare. It only appears here in Mark's Gospel and is preserved in the same story in both Matt 19:23 and Luke 18:24, showing their interdependence. The adjective δύσκολόν appears in the following v. 24. As Jesus continues to teach his disciples, there is an evolution from πῶς δυσκόλως (v. 23) and πῶς δύσκολόν (v. 24) to ἀδύνατον (v. 27), intensifying Jesus' axiom from *how difficult* for those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God to the statement, "For human beings, *it is impossible*."

Seeking to distinguish the original sayings of Jesus from the redactional work of Mark, Best isolates v. 23b and v. 24b as two different logia, which were used by Mark in the present

<sup>5</sup> John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002), 304.

<sup>6</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 480.

<sup>7</sup> Malbon, *Hearing Mark*, 3.

context. Affirming that v. 24b is a general saying without reference to possessions, Best affirms that, “It is most unlikely that both are original; we must therefore give the preference to v. 23b which is specific and concrete and therefore much more like the kind of statement that would come from Jesus.”<sup>8</sup> Accepting Best’s view, Jesus’ saying about entering the kingdom is used here not only to make the connection to the preceding story, but also to comment, expand, and radicalize the requirement of following Jesus, moving from a personal call story to a practical teaching about entering the βασιλεία of God.

The requirements for entering the kingdom of God are a theme present in this section of the Gospel (cf. 9:47; 10:15; 10:23). Collins suggests that there is a contextual link between v. 22 and the earlier saying in v. 15, when the kingdom of God was last mentioned. There Jesus affirms that, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child (does) shall not enter it.” According to Collins, there is a contrast between children “who have no possessions legally their own and those who have many possessions at their disposal.”<sup>9</sup> The result is that attachment to property is a difficulty in responding accordingly to the demands of the kingdom.

According to R. Alan Culpepper, the conditions for entering the kingdom of God require radical decision (9:47) and receptivity (10:15). He explains that the rich man’s question to Jesus about what he had to do to “inherit eternal life” (10:17) was analogously about what he needed to do to “enter the kingdom of God” (10:23).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, these expressions have the same meaning and deal with the question about how to take part in the kingdom of God.

In the beginning of his Gospel, Mark had pointed out that Jesus brings about ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (1:15), and now he explicitly relates calling to discipleship and the difficulty of τὴν

---

<sup>8</sup> Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 480

<sup>10</sup> Alan R. Culpepper, *Mark* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publisher, 2007), 338.

βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελεύσονται. For sure, μετάνοια is needed in order to respond adequately to Jesus' call and enter into the dynamic of God's kingdom.

24 οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἐθαμβοῦντο ἐπὶ τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν ἀποκριθεὶς λέγει αὐτοῖς· τέκνα, πῶς δύσκολόν ἐστιν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθεῖν·

*And the disciples were astounded at his words. And Jesus said again to them, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God!"*

After Jesus' comment, the disciples were astounded. The word θαμβάομαι occurs only in the Gospel of Mark. It also appears in 1:27, when the crowds in Capernaum were astounded after Jesus had cast out an unclean spirit from a man in the synagogue, and in 10:32, when Jesus leads the way to Jerusalem and "they," presumably the disciples, "were astounded and those who followed were afraid." Most scholars agree that the disciples' astonishment is because, in biblical and culture terms, richness was perceived as a sign of God's favor and blessing, and a sign that a person was obeying God's commandments.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Deut. 28:1-14; 30:8-10 and Prov. 10:22 attest to this belief. The dominant ideology of the time, according to Ched Myers, "dictated that *wealth = blessing from God*."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus reverses this notion and, therefore, his teaching about wealth can be considered countercultural. In Francis Moloney's view, the disciples' strong reaction (ἐθαμβοῦντο) to Jesus' words (ἐπὶ τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ) serves to stress this countercultural nature of Jesus' teaching regarding the difficulty of those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples, according to him, "are unable to accept that such teaching could be correct. Their

<sup>11</sup> See Collins, *Mark*, 480; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 304; and Culpepper, *Mark*, 338-339.

<sup>12</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y.; Orbis Books, 1988), 275.

world was a world where the wealthy determined everything, from religion to politics, and everything in between.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, here as in other instances in his Gospel like the teaching on divorce (v. 10:10-12) and on the Sabbath (2:27-28), Mark presents Jesus radicalizing an Old Testament teaching.

Jesus’ use of the vocative τέκνα to address his disciples in v. 24 is its only occurrence in the Gospels. It could convey Jesus’ affection toward the astonished disciples, similar to when he had addressed a paralytic man in 2:5 using the vocative τέκνον (singular form).<sup>14</sup>

The more general statement made by Jesus, affirming that it is hard for anyone to enter into the kingdom of God, makes the reading of this verse difficult. At the first glance, it seems to repeat what Jesus has said in the previous verse, but it leaves out “those who have possessions.” Best suggests that v. 24b was not an original saying of Jesus but was created by Mark out of v. 23b. Whether this is the case or not, Jesus’ second statement (in the present indicative form, ἐστίν) does not make the reading of Jesus’ first statement (in the future tense, εἰσελεύσονται) any softer, but toughens it. Approaching the text as we have it today, v. 24b should not be isolated in the aim of softening Jesus’ teaching about possessions and the kingdom of God. It should be read taking into consideration its preceding and subsequent verses, which make clear the great difficulty for anyone who has possessions to enter the kingdom of God.

Because of the difficult reading of this verse, some manuscripts (MMS) added words to it, trying to improve it and fitting it in a more logical sequence.<sup>15</sup> The Western text (W) adds

---

<sup>13</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 201.

<sup>14</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 304.

<sup>15</sup> M. Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 89-90.

πλούσιον (rich person), turning Jesus' saying into "how difficult it is for *a rich man* to enter into the kingdom of God." It also places v. 24 after v. 25 trying to make a more logical sequence.<sup>16</sup>

MSS A C D et al. added the words τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐπὶ χρέμασιν, changing the saying to "how difficult it is *for those who put their trust in possessions* to enter into the kingdom of God." This change clearly softens the saying, changing the focus from "having possessions" to "putting trust in them". The problem becomes not the possessions but trusting in them. Most scholars follow the text attested in  $\aleph$  B  $\Delta$  et al., which has the shorter and more difficult reading, without any attempt to make "improvements" to the saying. Therefore, the shorter saying is probably more original.<sup>17</sup>

25 εὐκοπώτερόν ἐστιν κάμηλον διὰ [τῆς] τρυμαλιᾶς [τῆς] ῥαφίδος διελθεῖν ἢ πλούσιον εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθεῖν.

*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God."*

It should be noted that the form τῆς before τρυμαλιᾶς and ῥαφίδος is read in  $\aleph$  A C et al, but omitted in B E 2427.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus now makes use of a metaphor to illustrate his teaching. The image is vivid and serves to reinforce what he has stated in the previous verses. Metaphor has the power to stir up the audience's imagination, to involve them both intellectually and emotionally in what is being

<sup>16</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 304.

<sup>17</sup> See Collins, *Mark*, 474; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1963), 431; and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Paternoster Press, 2002), 398.

<sup>18</sup> *Greek-English New Testament*, eds. Barbara Aland and others, 7th rev. ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981), 123.

affirmed, and to help them in the process of interpretation. The disciples of Jesus and, most importantly Mark's audience, can visualize the meaning of what Jesus had said earlier, "*How difficult it will be for those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God.*"

Like v. 23b, Best holds that v. 25 was not a creation of Mark, but came to him in tradition.<sup>19</sup> Best does not see any sign of Markan redaction in it and even suggests that this saying may have come directly from Jesus. He affirms that v. 23b, v.24, and v. 25, form a typical Markan sandwich, where v. 24, created by Mark, is placed between v. 23b and v. 25, which already existed in the pre-Markan tradition. He conjectures that the sayings in v. 23b and v. 25 came to be associated with vv. 17-22 (the story of the rich man) during the oral period when sayings on the same subject tended to be grouped. Regarding the original context of v. 25, Best concludes:

Thus our analysis implies that the original context of v. 25 is not known to us. The effect of v. 25 following v. 23b is to increase the emphasis on wealth as a hindrance to entrance into the Kingdom so that it in effect becomes almost an impossibility. This magnified severity then entered its present context during the oral period.<sup>20</sup>

Taken by itself, the saying asserts that it is nearly if not actually impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. In general, scholars classify this saying as hyperbole,<sup>21</sup> that is, the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device like those found in Luke 6:41-42 and Matt 23:24. It exemplifies how difficult is for a πλούσιον (*a wealthy person*) to enter the Kingdom of God. Reading this saying as proverbial, Moloney asserts that Jesus' words should not be taken as hyperbole, an exaggeration, and continues, "This statement means what it says: it is

---

<sup>19</sup> Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 20-23.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> Supporting this classification is Collins, *Mark*, 480; Culpepper, *Mark*, 339; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 304; and Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 431.



impossible.”<sup>22</sup> He reads this saying in light of what Jesus affirms next (v. 27), “Jesus means exactly what he says. It is impossible for anyone to enter the kingdom by his or her own means.”<sup>23</sup>

A few late manuscripts (*f*<sup>13</sup> 28 et al.) have κάμιλον (*rope*) instead of κάμηλον (*camel*). According to Collins, “This reading could have arisen by mistake, but is probably a secondary attempt to reduce the extravagance of the hyperbole or to choose an image that corresponds better to the function of a needle.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, some late interpreters suggested that there was a narrow gate in the walls of Jerusalem used by pedestrians, called “the eye of a needle,” through which with some difficulties a camel might pass.<sup>25</sup> Rejecting this interpretation, R. T. France explains, “The resulting image of a camel stripped of its load and bending its knees and neck to get through the pedestrian gate offers rich homiletical possibilities, but sadly it remains an unsupported guess.”<sup>26</sup> Scholars agree that there is simply no historical evidence to support such a fanciful interpretation.

It is interesting to note how some late manuscripts and interpreters have tried to soften the hard saying of Jesus in v. 25. Reading it as hyperbole or as proverbial does not take away the vivid image that the saying conveys to the audience. Some later readers of Mark are clearly uncomfortable with this striking image fashioned by Jesus in v. 25 and have tried to make it easier for those who have possessions to gain access to the kingdom of God. This should cause modern readers (especially those who possess wealth) to wonder how they have been interpreting v. 25. Are they allowing its vivid image to come to full disclosure and rigor, or are they trying to downplay and ease its powerful and challenging picture?

---

<sup>22</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 201.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>24</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 474.

<sup>25</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 201.

<sup>26</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 405.

26 οἱ δὲ περισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες πρὸς ἑαυτούς· καὶ τίς δύναται σωθῆναι;

*And, they were extremely astonished and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"*

Now the astonishment of the disciples has dramatically increased in comparison with v.

24. R. T. France indicates that the disciples' intensified reaction matches the progression of Jesus' hard words, "The escalation from δυσκόλως to impossibility is matched by a corresponding increase in the disciples' astonishment, from ἐθαμβοῦντο (v. 24) to περισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο."<sup>27</sup> The powerful metaphor uttered by Jesus in the preceding verse neither goes unheard nor ends the already apprehensive exchange, but causes the disciples express even greater anxiety. Considering the context, the disciples' response shows that they have not yet overcome the fact that it is impossible for a rich person (πλούσιον) to enter the Kingdom of God.

Collins sees the disciples' question as part of the recurring theme of the disciples' misunderstanding in Mark, and shows that the disciples have not comprehended or accepted Jesus' challenge to the traditional biblical and cultural wisdom that wealth is a sign of God's blessing and favor.<sup>28</sup> Their reaction entails that if the rich cannot be saved, then no one can. The disciples may have also associated Jesus' general statement about the difficulty of everyone (v. 24) with the impossibility of those who have possessions (v. 25) to enter the kingdom of God.<sup>29</sup>

Although important MMS (⋈ B C Δ et al.) attest to the reading πρὸς αὐτὸν (they said *to him*) instead of πρὸς ἑαυτούς (they said *to one another*), read in A D W,<sup>30</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 405.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 481.

<sup>29</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 201-202.

<sup>30</sup> See the apparatus in *The Greek New Testament*, 161.

Collins see this as a correction, trying to fit the context best.<sup>31</sup> The use of πρὸς ἑαυτούς, however, is frequent in Mark (see 1:27; 11:31; and 16:3). Here it serves to stress the astonishment and confusion among the disciples, giving Jesus the opportunity to develop his teaching further.

As he tries to single out the more original saying of Jesus in this section, Best upholds that v. 26b belongs to the early vocabulary of the Church due the use of σώζειν.<sup>32</sup> The question, “Who can be saved?” (τίς δύναται σωθῆναι;), however, could indicate entrance into the kingdom of God. Its close link with ζωὴ αἰώνιος (v. 17), θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ (v. 21), and εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ (vv. 23, 24, 25) suggests this meaning.<sup>33</sup> According to Vincent Taylor, it may have an eschatological nuance, and could be translated as, “Who will finally be found within the *Basileia*?”<sup>34</sup>

The focus of the question, however, should be placed on *can*, in another words, “How *can* anyone be saved/enter the kingdom of God? How can this be possible?” Underneath this question is also the question of control and power. If the rich cannot have control over his salvation, who can?

Since Jesus’ words are increasingly tough as the discussion proceeds, Mark’s audience could very well sympathize with the correspondingly increasing astonishment of the disciples. Mark makes the experience of reading his Gospel full of surprises as he keeps building up tension and making new revelations. It is through this reading/listening experience that the audience is challenged to reflect on their own commitment to Jesus and his radical teachings.

---

<sup>31</sup> See Collins, *Mark*, 474; and Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor and France support this view. See Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 432; and France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 405-406.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 432.

27 ἐμβλέψας αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει· παρὰ ἀνθρώποις ἀδύνατον, ἀλλ' οὐ παρὰ θεῷ·  
πάντα γὰρ δυνατὰ παρὰ τῷ θεῷ.

*Looking at them, Jesus said, "For human beings, it is impossible, but not for God. For everything is possible for God."*

The gesture of Jesus of ἐμβλέψας αὐτοῖς (looking at them, disciples) recounts his attitude towards the rich man when Jesus ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ (looked at him) with love and told him to go sell what he had, give to the poor, and follow him (v. 21). Jesus' teaching is still unfolding in the story of the rich man. Taylor indicates that the use of ἐμβλέψας is peculiar to Mark (cf. 8:25 and 14:67) and serves here to stress the saying that Jesus is about to convey.<sup>35</sup>

Best affirms that v. 27, like v. 26, is Mark's addition to the earlier vv. 23-25. He classifies the saying of v. 27 as a "theological maxim" grounded on certain Old Testament passages (like Zech 8:16; Job 10:13; 42:2; Gen 18:14), which could much easier have come from Paul than from Jesus.<sup>36</sup> Without further explanation or citing any source, Best suggests that vv. 26b-27 "were a question and answer drawn from the instruction of catechumens."<sup>37</sup> Elaborating on the result of this supposed addition of vv. 26, 27 to the earlier saying of v. 25 that he attributed to Jesus, Best infers:

The effect of this addition has been to change a saying about the difficulty of entering the Kingdom (with special reference to the difficulties created by wealth) into a theological statement expressing the impossibility of becoming a Christian except by the grace of God. Mark is but the first to have turned the edge of a "hard" saying by transforming it into a theological proposition!<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>36</sup> Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 20.

Although Best's textual critique can hardly be proved definitive, it reminds us that the text as we have it today bears not only the imprints of Mark's redaction work but also his theological input.

Whereas Jesus' answer is in accordance with some teachings found in the Old Testament, as Best pointed out, it differs substantially from Hellenistic writers such as Epictetus and Crates (related to Cynic philosophy). Collins underscores that these Greek philosophers understand that the morally good life and the proper relationship with possessions are matters that fall under human control.<sup>39</sup> For the Markan Jesus, it is God, not human beings, who is in control of such matters. Going further, Collins sees that, with this saying of Jesus, Mark is addressing the situation of his audiences, which have some members who were literate and had property. According to her, "This saying acknowledges that such people may be saved and opposes the inference that only the poor will enter the kingdom of God."<sup>40</sup>

Reading v. 27 in its immediate context, however, suggests that the aim of Jesus' saying is not to facilitate the salvation of the wealthy of Mark's audience, but to emphasize that God's power is beyond human limits. God's capacity to make the "impossible possible" can be understood that Jesus' demands of renouncing possessions to enter God's kingdom can be achieved (vv. 28-31) only by God's power and grace. In Moloney's view, "No one enters the kingdom of God. It is not something that human beings are able to do by virtue of their possessions, strength, wisdom, or authority."<sup>41</sup> Human beings ultimately depend on God to enter the kingdom. According to Moloney, what is asked of the rich man and the disciples is "receptivity to the countercultural ways of God, made evident in the person and teaching of

---

<sup>39</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 481.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>41</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 202.

Jesus.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Culpepper argues that v. 27 conveys that salvation is exclusively and totally a gift of God’s grace that no human virtue or effort can achieve on its own. He affirms:

Entering the kingdom, inheriting eternal life, or gaining salvation is therefore a paradoxical matter. It requires abandoning all pretense and proof of one’s virtue, abandoning every other pursuit besides the kingdom of God and everything that might offer one security, remove every temptation, and receive the kingdom in childlike simplicity, and still nothing one can do ensures one’s salvation. It is entirely a matter of God’s goodness, a free gift from God.<sup>43</sup>

As the narrative continues, the disciples show some important signs of reliance on God’s power at work in Jesus, since they have left everything to follow him, responding positively to his call.

28 Ἦρξατο λέγειν ὁ Πέτρος αὐτῷ· ἰδοὺ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν πάντα καὶ ἠκολουθήκαμέν σοι.

*Peter said to him, “Look, we left everything and have followed you.”*

Best observes that vv. 28-31 does not match very well the previous two sections (vv. 17-22 and vv. 23-27).<sup>44</sup> In his view, this last section speaks of reward on earth and family relationships that were never mentioned earlier. He also sees incoherence in what Peter states in v. 28:

[t]he historical Peter had not at his call (1:16-18) left house and wife (1:29-31), and may even have continued to possess a boat (3:9; 4:1, 36) and a net (Matt 17:24-27), and so he could not have said “we have left all”; if the saying of vv. 29f had originally been addressed to Peter it would surely have contained a reference to “ships” rather than “fields.”<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>43</sup> Culpepper, *Mark*, 340.

<sup>44</sup> Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 18.

According to Best, vv. 28-31 is a creation of Mark that serves to clarify the meaning of 10:17-31. He adds that the effect of the addition of vv. 28-31 to the earlier materials is to broaden the challenge of Jesus (v. 21) beyond wealth into the area of family relationships and to guarantee the rewards that follow from the surrender of possessions and family, both now and in the world to come.

It is hard to sustain Best's affirmation about the historical Peter based only on the passages he mentions. They are vague and do not necessarily wish to convey historical data, but to narrate a Gospel (1:1). As the story unfolds, new information and problems appear, making the narrative evolve and so become more compelling to its audience. Perhaps here, more light is shed on what happened to the disciples in the beginning of the story and how in the story their behavior begin to differentiate them from other characters, like the rich man.

As on other occasions (cf. 8:29; 9:5), Peter takes the initiative, now speaking in the name of the whole itinerant group of the disciples. Ἦρξατο (*began*) functions as a transition marker, typical of Mark's vocabulary (cf. 4:1; 5:17; 6:2, 34; 8:31).<sup>46</sup>

In the narrative context, Peter makes a remark<sup>47</sup> that contrasts the disciples' attitude with the rich man's response to Jesus' call. Unlike the rich man, Peter observes that the traveling disciples have left everything and followed Jesus. They have joined Jesus, following him throughout Galilee, and now they are journeying (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) to Jerusalem. Moreover, it seems that the disciples are following Jesus' lifestyle, lacking any possessions.

There is something to be said about the use of ἀκολουθέω in the perfect indicative tense (ἠκολουθήκαμεν) in contrast to ἀφίημι in aorist active indicative tense (ἀφήκαμεν). While the aorist indicative usually designates a punctual completed event in the past time (*they left*), the

<sup>46</sup> See Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 305; and Culpepper, *Mark*, 340.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew added a question to Peter's observation, τί ἄρα ἔσται ἡμῖν; (*What then will be for us?*) (cf. Mt. 19:27).

perfect indicative describes an event that, completed in the past, has results existing in the present time (*they have followed*).<sup>48</sup> The perfect indicative conveys the idea that the action occurred in the past continues to have an effect on the present. In this sense, we can say that the disciples have once wholly decided to follow Jesus and that decision continues to affect their present condition.

Peter's remarks may resonate with Mark's audience, those who like the disciples have responded positively to the call of Jesus and are represented in the words of Peter. In this respect, the disciples are now models of discipleship. Their role serves to clarify and reinforce that following Jesus requires responding positively to Jesus' call, leaving everything behind, and following him, something that the rich man has failed to do (10:22). In the narrative, the disciples' attitudes show that it is possible to become a follower of Jesus, even if this entails difficulties and hard renunciation, and will ultimately need to rely on God's power.

29 ἔφη ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὃς ἀφῆκεν οἰκίαν ἢ ἀδελφοὺς ἢ ἀδελφὰς ἢ μητέρα ἢ πατέρα ἢ τέκνα ἢ ἀγροὺς ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ ἕνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου,

*Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms because of me and because of the Good News.*

Mark uses the interjection ἀμὴν fourteen times in his Gospel, mostly stressing particularly important statements like promises or warnings about rewards and sentences (cf. 3:28; 9:1; 9:41; 10:15; 10:29). Here it stresses Jesus' promise of rewards for the disciples who have left everything because of him and the εὐαγγέλιον. But it also warns that the reward does not come without hardships (v.30). The expression ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν is a distinctive Markan style

<sup>48</sup> See Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 433; and Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 305.



and becomes more frequent in the second part of the Gospel (see 3:28; 8:12; and then 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25, 30).<sup>49</sup>

Collins supports the reading ἡ μητέρα ἢ πατέρα (*or mother or father*) as the earliest reading (attested in B C W et al.). MMS x A read ἡ πατέρα ἢ μητέρα (*or father or mother*) and may be trying to “correct the order.” MMS D a ff k attest the reading ἡ μητέρα, omitting πατέρα in order to harmonize with v. 30, which does not have πατέρα. Supporting her view, Collins writes:

The discrepancy between the two verses is understandable, since, on the one hand, discipleship may involve leaving one’s biological father (cf. 1:20), but, on the other, the criticism of hierarchy (cf. 9:33-37; 10:41-45) led to a lack of emphasis on the notion of spiritual or metaphorical fatherhood. Thus, the reading of B C et al. is probably the earliest, and that of x A a correction to the more usual order.<sup>50</sup>

France suggests that the presence of ἀγρούς (*farms*) in the end of the list (and not in the beginning with οἰκίαν, *house*) demonstrates the author’s intent to show that “[w]hile almost everyone has a house and family to leave, only a few would possess land, so that this is a special addition for the affluent.”<sup>51</sup> France’s observation points out the link between Jesus’ promise in vv. 29-30 and the story of the rich man (vv. 17-22). Jesus’ promise affirms the attitude of those who have left their possessions, here in the form of ἀγρούς (*farms*).

There is also a verbal link between v. 29, the earlier call of the disciples (cf. 1:18, 20), and Peter’s declaration in v. 28. These verses employ the same verb ἀφίημι (*leave*). *Leaving* and *following* are interconnected in the way of the discipleship of Jesus. Now, Jesus lists key and challenging elements that this *leaving* entails and that will not be overlooked.

<sup>49</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 268.

<sup>50</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 475.

<sup>51</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 407.

It is also important to note that v. 29 puts Jesus and the Good News on the same level (ἐνεκεν ἑμοῦ καὶ ἐνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). Donahue and Harrington observe that the early Christian summaries of faith identify Jesus and the gospel (cf. Rom 1:3-4; 1 Cor 15:1, 3-5), but do not assume that the historical Jesus used this same language.<sup>52</sup>

Although Mark 10:17-31 deals with the problem of Christian discipleship and the demand of renunciation of possessions, it is important to keep in mind that it treats the question in a wider narrative form, always making new revelation as the story progresses. Jesus is now speaking of leaving behind house, family ties, and properties on account of *him* and the εὐαγγέλιον, and further developing the early association made by Mark between Jesus and the εὐαγγέλιον in the first verse (1:1). Now the Gospel explicitly associates the three elements: discipleship, Jesus, and the εὐαγγέλιον. As the narrative progresses, the audience learns about Jesus, the εὐαγγέλιον, and the demands and rewards of their commitment to both.

Furthermore, Mark is also addressing the situation of his first audience. Collins affirms that this saying of Jesus (v. 28) has two levels of significance. On one level, it speaks of Peter and the other disciples who are characters in the narrative. On another level, it speaks to the situation of Mark's audience. Peter and the disciples have responded to the call of Jesus and have left everything behind. She understands that the disciples, however, belong to a special category: "Mark does not imply that all who would be followers of Jesus and members of early Christian communities must leave families, farms, or other types of work in order to do so."<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Collins, like France, reads renunciation of family ties and possessions vis-à-vis the itinerant ministry of the disciples in the narrative and those who leave home to proclaim the

---

<sup>52</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 305.

<sup>53</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 481.

εὐαγγέλιον, i.e., the early Christian missionaries.<sup>54</sup> According to them, this teaching is not meant for everyone in the Christian community.

Donahue and Harrington affirm that the kind of poverty intended in Mark's Gospel is apostolic or mission-oriented, assumed for the sake of God's kingdom, rather than ascetic in the sense that self-denial becomes an end in itself. They affirm that "...[t]hose who follow Jesus should voluntarily cultivate a simple lifestyle in the service of the apostolic mission and not allow concern for earthly possessions to prevent them from carrying out their mission."<sup>55</sup>

The list in v. 29 may be addressing more directly Mark's first audience. However, the teaching regarding renunciation of possessions in order to enter the kingdom of God implicates all followers of Jesus (v. 23). Nobody is exempted from it. Jesus had earlier made statements that implicate all his followers, for instance, when he said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (3:35), implying a new family relationship based on "doing the will of the Father". Moreover, *leaving everything behind* coheres with the overall message of the Gospel, destined to "anyone with ears to hear to listen" (4:9).

30 εἰ μὴ λάβῃ ἑκατονταπλασίονα νῦν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ οἰκίας καὶ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἀδελφὰς καὶ μητέρας καὶ τέκνα καὶ ἀγροὺς μετὰ διωγμῶν, καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

*who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.*

<sup>54</sup> See *ibid.*, 482, and France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 407-408.

<sup>55</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 307.

The form ἐὰν μὴ λάβῃ can be translated literally as “if he/she/it will not receive” and complements what was said in v. 29, οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὃς ἀφῆκεν (*there is no one who has left*). Matthew and Luke replaced ἑκατονταπλασίονα (*a hundredfold*) with πολλαπλασίονα (*manyfold*), perhaps because the former seemed excessive (cf. Matt 19:29; Luke 18:30).<sup>56</sup>

Scholars uphold that the notion of two ages, “now in this time” (νῦν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ) and “in the age to come” (ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ), is common in Jewish apocalyptic texts and rabbinic literature.<sup>57</sup> Donahue and Harrington, however, call attention to a distinction between v. 30 and the general view of the Jewish literature concerning the “two ages/worlds.” They affirm that:

The list of benefits describes the inaugurated or anticipated aspects of the kingdom of God to be experienced already in the Christian community. Thus the picture of “this age” is more positive than that of Jewish apocalypticism in which the present age/world was often viewed as overwhelmingly evil.<sup>58</sup>

There is a textual link between the call of the rich man and this section. In 10:17, the rich man asked Jesus about what he needs to do in order to inherit ζωὴν αἰώνιον (*eternal life*). Now, in v. 30, Jesus promises ζωὴν αἰώνιον (*eternal life*) to those who have left everything behind and followed him. What the rich man failed to achieve is now promised for the disciples, those who have left everything and followed Jesus. The contrast sheds positive light on the disciples once again. Moreover, the contrast prepares for v. 31,<sup>59</sup> which will close the entire passage (10:17-31) with a word of reversal, or even, a word of subversion.

The list of rewards ends with a twist, adding μετὰ διωγμῶν, which also stands out for its different form (instead of καὶ διωγμούς). This seems to be a Markan addition that serves to address the historical situation of his community undergoing persecution. The reference to

<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 434.

<sup>57</sup> See Collins, *Mark*, 485; Culpepper, *Mark*, 381; and Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 203.

<sup>58</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 305-306.

<sup>59</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 483.

persecution is absent from both Matthew's and Luke's parallels. Regardless of the source of the phrase, Donahue and Harrington remark, "[i]t is a brilliant reminder of the mystery of the cross in the midst of a list of the positive benefits of discipleship."<sup>60</sup>

31 πολλοὶ δὲ ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ [οἱ] ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι.

*But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

The article οἱ is read in B C f<sup>13</sup>, but omitted in ̳ A D LW *et al.*<sup>61</sup> Matthew's parallel also omits it (cf. Matt 19:30).

The fact that this saying appears in Luke and in two different contexts in Matthew (cf. Luke 13:30 and Matt 19:30; 20:16) supports the view that it could be originally from Q. It seems to be an independent saying that Mark ascribed to its present context. In a few words, it powerfully expresses the idea of surprising reversal, inaugurated by the arrival of the kingdom of God.

Taking into consideration the entire passage (10:17-31), Collins states:

[t]his saying takes up the theme of the subversion of the traditional view that the rich are blessed by God. Many of the rich, who appear to be those to whom the kingdom of God belongs, will *not* enter into it, whereas many of the poor, who seem to be abandoned by God, *will* enter into it.<sup>62</sup>

Analyzing the saying in its broader context, Culpepper explains convincingly how the saying of Jesus sums up his various teachings in this section of the Gospel:

In this context, this free-floating saying gathers up the theme of most of this chapter. Those who put themselves first, such as the disciples who sought to stop the unauthorized exorcist (9:38-39) and those who were bringing children to Jesus (10:13-16), those who divorce their wives (10:1-22), and the rich who rely on the

<sup>60</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 306.

<sup>61</sup> *The Greek New Testament*, 162.

<sup>62</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 483 (her italics).

security of their possessions (10:17-22) will be last, while those who give a cup of water (9:41), the servants of all (9:35), the children and those who are like them (9:36-37; 10:13-16), and those who sacrifice all for Jesus and the good news (10:28-30) will be first.<sup>63</sup>

The saying is also akin to what Jesus will tell the disciples in the following passage concerning authority (10:35-45). When John and James manifest their desire for a place of authority in Jesus' glory, stirring indignation among the other disciples, Jesus teaches them that the way of discipleship stands in total contradiction to what the logic of the world teaches. Jesus says to them, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be *first* among you must be slave of all" (vv. 43b-44). In addition, v. 31 also points to the reversal playing out in Jesus' very life, for he reveals himself not as a glorified Messiah, seeking to be served, but as a Suffering Servant, rejected and put to death on the cross, yet who will be raised and will return in glory. Therefore, the saying of Jesus in v. 31 not only appropriately concludes its immediate context, but also coheres with the entire narrative.

Mark's redaction of this saying of Jesus into this context reinforces the contrast between the rich man's and the disciples' response to Jesus and the new ways of the kingdom of God. The saying by itself also conveys a warning for both Jesus' disciples and Mark's audience. The kingdom of God seems to be full of paradoxes and surprises, constantly challenging the world order. In these terms, Moloney states:

[t]he agenda of Jesus turns the world upside down. A vocation to *service* and *receptivity*, now indicated as the *only* way to enter the kingdom (vv. 24-27), is a vocation to a reversal of values. Praise and promise are found in 10:29-30, but this praise and promise are directed toward the many whom society and culture would regard as the least. Paradoxically, they will be the first, while those regarded as the first will become the last (v. 31).<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Culpepper, *Mark*, 341.

<sup>64</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 203 (his italics).

In summary, there are several points that deserve our attention in this exegetical study. It is clear that Mark 10:23-31 bears in several aspects the redactional work of Mark who knitted different independent sayings like v. 25 and v. 31 into this account. Moreover, Jesus' teaching his disciples privately after a public event is a typical feature of the author. The pericope also contains typical Markan vocabulary (like ἤρξατο in v. 28) and expressions (like ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν in v. 29).

Although the work of textual and redaction criticism is helpful, the meaning of the pericope comes out more fully when reading it as a whole and considering its near context and its place in the entire narrative. Analysis of particular verses (like v.24b) needs to be placed in the Gospel context to see how it coheres with the whole pericope. It is also crucial to read vv. 23-31 as a further development of the story of the rich man. The narrative evolves from a question about inheriting eternal life and a call for discipleship into observations about the difficulty of those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God and promise of rewards for those who have left everything behind because of Jesus and the good news. It moves from a personal encounter with Jesus to a more general teaching addressed to the whole community of disciples. In this movement, the pericope sharply contrasts the disciples' and the rich man's response to Jesus' call for discipleship. It makes the narrative more vivid and appealing, and more challenging for its audience.

Dealing thoroughly with the question of discipleship, Mark 10:23-31 portrays the disciples in a rare positive light due to their renunciation of possessions and family ties for the sake of Jesus and the good news. In the end, it becomes clear for the reader that discipleship requires renunciation of possessions and openness to the kingdom of God. Jesus' promise of

reward is based on the disciples' renunciation for the sake of him and his Gospel. In other words, discipleship requires complete surrender to God's kingdom revealed in the person and in the teachings of Jesus.

There is also a very strong element of reversal in 10:23-31 that is common in the Second Gospel. Entrance into the kingdom of God and access to its rewards in this time and in the age to come is only possible by renunciation and a new radical reorientation of one's life. It requires a reversal of common religious and cultural values ingrained in one's personal life, possible not by human efforts but by God's power. The following of Jesus is a paradox stemming from the paradox of the cross, which bears witness to Jesus the Messiah who "came not to be served but to serve, and give up his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).

There is little doubt that this teaching to the disciples is aimed to address important issues in Mark's community. Peter's intervention and Jesus' promise of rewards (vv. 28-31) speak directly to them. What the first disciples had renounced in the story finds echoes in the life of Mark's original audience. In the response of Jesus to Peter, the author lists what they have renounced because of Jesus and the Gospel. The disciples' and the first Christians' renunciations make it possible for the seed of the word of God to take root and yield fruit, not permitting that the "cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire or other things come in and choke the word" (cf. 4:18-19).

## **2. Comparison to other Markan passages regarding exemplary discipleship**

There are other stories in Mark that point to exemplary discipleship and speak of renunciation. We will briefly survey these stories, focusing on the verses that highlight the



importance of renunciation in Christian discipleship. The hope is to shed more light on 10:23-31 and its place in the overall narrative.

a) καὶ εὐθὺς ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ. (1:18)

*And they immediately left their nets and followed him.*

In this first call account (1:16-20), Jesus takes the initiative and summons the fishermen to follow him when they are in the midst of their everyday work.<sup>65</sup> The call is not an irresistible order, but a gift that requires openness. This will become clearer as the drama develops and the audience learns that Jesus' call can be refused (cf. 10:22).

Speaking on behalf of the disciples, Peter will later bring up their positive response to Jesus, serving in the plot as a contrast to the rich man's negative response. His words in 10:28 recount the event of 1:18 and highlight the proper response to the discipleship encapsulated in the key verbs ἀφίημι and ἀκολουθέω. It is noteworthy that the disciples' prompt response (καὶ εὐθὺς) makes a link with the urgency of Jesus' proclamation in the preceding v. 15 (Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ).

Christopher Marshall also indicates a connection between 1:14-15 and vv. 16-20, affirming that the fishermen's response of *leaving* and *following* Jesus supposes and conveys respectively the conversion (μετανοεῖτε) and faith (πιστεύετε) demanded in v. 15.<sup>66</sup> The correlation between *repent-believe* and *left-followed* makes the first disciples exemplary in their

<sup>65</sup> Martin Hengel parallels Jesus' call and God's call of prophets (see Amos 7:15) in the Old Testament and see a "stylization" of the call of discipleship in the Synoptics in terms of the call of Elisha by Elijah. See Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, ed. John Riches, trans. James Greig (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 71-72.

<sup>66</sup> Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 136.

response to Jesus' proclamation of the εὐαγγέλιον, even though they may not yet be aware of the full consequences of their response. The disciples' *leaving* and *following*, acknowledged by Jesus in 10:29, speaks directly to Mark's audience and illustrates for them the concrete character and implications of discipleship. Becoming a follower of Jesus encompasses breaking with the existing order and embarking on a new orientation towards God's in-breaking kingdom in Jesus. Marshall describes what is at stake in the following terms:

The fishermen abandon their possessions and means of livelihood: their nets and boats (vv. 18, 20); they relinquish their positions of human authority over hired servants (v. 20); and, most demanding of all, they detach themselves from family ties and traditions, the main source of identity for first century Palestinians.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, there is no doubt that Christian discipleship is highly demanding from the beginning. The newness of Jesus and the εὐαγγέλιον demands that the old ways be left behind. The disciples' response will not be forgotten. In 10:29-30, Jesus promises them a hundredfold more of what they have left, with persecution. These are the gains of the new orientation to God's kingdom.

b)      ὁ δὲ ἀποβαλὼν τὸ ἱμάτιον αὐτοῦ ἀναπηδήσας ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν. (10:50)

καὶ εὐθὺς ἀνέβλεψεν, καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ. (10:52b)

*And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.*

*And immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.*

There are important signs that make the Bartimaeus passage (10:46-52) more than simply a healing account. The story shows him as a model of discipleship. Along with the passage of the blind man who is cured in stages (8:22-26), the Bartimaeus story frames the section dedicated

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 137.

to instruct the disciples about the true identity of Jesus and the way of discipleship (8:27-10:45). Moreover, the use of the key verb ἠκολούθει, stating that he followed Jesus, makes Bartimaeus a disciple like others who have been following Jesus (cf. 1:18; 2:14, 15; 6:1; 8:34; 9:38; 10:21, 18, 32). Finally, Bartimaeus did not just gain his sight; he also followed Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ to Jerusalem (which will lead to the cross), something that the disciples are unwilling to accept and are fearful to do. Therefore, Bartimaeus, following Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, becomes a real model of discipleship.

It is also noteworthy that, while responding promptly to Jesus' call, Bartimaeus throws off his cloak. The meaning of this action should not be downplayed. There are certainly reasons for keeping it in the narrative. It points to his right disposition to Jesus' call that implicates renunciation of some sort in order to embrace a new way of life. Like the four fishermen, Bartimaeus first leaves something behind (his cloak) and then follows Jesus. Moloney makes the same connection when he comments:

[t]he immediacy of his [Bartimaeus'] response to Jesus' call matches that of the first disciples (see 1:16-20; 2:13-14). Those disciples left their trade, their possessions, and their fathers. Again matching that response, but perhaps surpassing them, he leaves his only vestige of dignity by the side of the road: he throws off his cloak (v. 50a). It is with nothing that Bartimaeus presents himself to Jesus, who is calling him, in order to receive the mercy and healing he believes Jesus, the Son of David, can administer (see vv. 47-48).<sup>68</sup>

Unlike the rich man, Bartimaeus renounces his only possession and follows Jesus. He becomes indeed an exceptional follower of Jesus and also a model to be respected and imitated by Mark's audience.

c) αὕτη δὲ ἐκ τῆς ὑστερήσεως αὐτῆς πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν ἔβαλεν, ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς. (12:44b)

---

<sup>68</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 210.

*She out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.*

The story of the widow (12:41-44) is placed between Jesus' disapproval of the scribes (12:38-40) and his declaration of the Temple's destruction (13:1-2). The poor widow stands in contrast to the scribes criticized by Jesus in the preceding verses. Jesus condemns the scribes for their ostentation, dishonesty, and exploitation of the weak, and now he takes notice of a poor widow for her tremendous economic renunciation and religious faithfulness.

The story of the widow's offering to the Temple's treasury also serves to anticipate the passage about Jesus' dramatic forecast of the Temple's destruction. Jesus' prediction (cf. 13:1-4) is a harsh condemnation of the political, economic, and ideological structure symbolized by the Temple, which complies with the exploitation of the society's most vulnerable.<sup>69</sup> His judgment of the Temple represents a rupture with the dominant economic order.

Before pointing out the widow's total offering, Jesus calls his disciples (καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ) and once again uses the expression Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, which denotes that something important is about to be stated. What Jesus is about to say is particularly important to the disciples, those who have been following him, and equally important for Mark's audience, who have been following the Gospel narrative. Jesus observes that the poor widow not only has put more than those who are contributing to the treasury, but she has also made the ultimate gift: out of her poverty, she has put in ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς, which can mean "all she has to live on," her "livelihood," or life itself, "the whole of her life."<sup>70</sup> Her gesture set her as an example for the disciples, teaching them the radical meaning of discipleship. Jesus had already told the crowd and the disciples that, "If anyone wants to become my follower,

<sup>69</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 318-323.

<sup>70</sup> Moloney believes that the double meaning was intended, "for in doing one she has done the other." See Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 247.

let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (see 8:34). It is necessary not only to deny one’s possessions but also his/her very self to become a follower of Jesus. The disciples who have left everything to follow Jesus need now to learn from Bartimaeus to follow Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ to cross and, like the poor widow, to make their own life the ultimate gift for Jesus and his εὐαγγέλιον (cf. 8:35). Unlike the rich man, the disciples responded positively to the first challenge regarding renunciation of possessions and following Jesus. Now the greatest challenge they will face is ahead in the narrative and beyond, when the time to face the ultimate renunciation of their very life because of Jesus will come (cf. 10:39b; 13:9-13).

Considering their context, these verses feature exemplary renunciation of possessions in the way of discipleship of Jesus. The disciples *left everything behind* and *followed* Jesus. Bartimaeus *throws off* his cloak and *follows* Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, the road of true discipleship. Finally, the poor widow *gives up* all she had, in fact, her whole life, and for this she is pointed out as model for the disciples. They certainly shed more light on the teaching of 10:23-31. In the case of Bartimaeus’ and the poor widow’s stories, they deepen the teaching on discipleship present in 10:23-31, attesting to a more radical meaning of discipleship in Mark.

Taking into account the entire narrative, the notion of discipleship emerges as a dynamic process that requires renunciation of all security and ultimately self-surrendering to the will of God as manifested in Jesus who “come to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). The story of the poor widow sums up what renunciation of possessions really entails for the disciples of Jesus. Those who wish to follow Jesus are called away from their everyday life, their network of support, their financial stability, and their desire for power, to a life of service and self-giving embodied in the Son of Man (cf. 10:42-45).

Unlike the rich man, who rejected a radical commitment to Jesus, the disciples in the beginning of the Gospel and in 10:23-31 take on Jesus' challenges and are depicted there in positive light. Now let us turn to the study of the whole of Mark's narrative in order to see how the disciples behave and how the reader/listener of the Gospel is expected to react to their characterization.

## CHAPTER II

### Markan Discipleship in Modern Scholarship

An attentive reader/listener of the Gospel of Mark will be puzzled by the way that the author of the Second Gospel portrays the disciples of Jesus. In the beginning, in the call narratives, Jesus' first disciples are introduced into the narrative in a positive way. They respond promptly to Jesus' call, leave everything behind, and follow him (1:16-20; 2:13-14). The positive portrayal of the disciples does not last long. Already in 4:13, the disciples show some evidence of their inability to understand Jesus' parable of the Sower. Further, after calming the storm, Jesus reprimands the disciples' fear and questions their lack of faith (4:40). By the middle of the Gospel, Peter, representing the community of the disciples of Jesus, is rebuked severely by Jesus for presumably not being able to grasp the true meaning of Jesus' messiahship (8:33). In the narrative of the passion, one of the disciples, Judas, betrays Jesus (14:43-46); the other disciples flee and abandon him (14:50-52); and Peter denies knowing Jesus three times (14:66). Finally, in the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection, the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee (15:40-41) run away from the empty tomb trembling and astonished, and, out of fear, they fail to tell Peter and the other disciples the Easter message (16:8).

Looking closely at the way the disciples behave in the Gospel narrative, we can ask, what is the meaning of discipleship that Mark wants to convey to his audience? Is the author's view of disciples hopelessly negative? How is the reader/listener expected to respond to the challenges posed by Mark's Gospel regarding discipleship? These are some questions that this second chapter will address, hoping to shed some light on these current debates.

Considering the extensive material and discussion on the theme of Markan discipleship and the scope of this thesis, the second chapter intends to analyze Mark's concept of discipleship primarily from a literary perspective, focusing on the narrative and its relationship with the audience. Because of its innovative, engaging, and still insightful use of literary criticism in the study of discipleship in Mark, important weight will be given to Robert C. Tannehill's article, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," published in 1977.<sup>71</sup> This choice supports the view that there is a movement in Mark's Gospel narrative that leads to the apparent failure of the disciples in the Markan story, though not necessarily to the failure of the Gospel's message. It will also investigate the kind of reaction and response the author intended the reader/listener to have, for the meaning of discipleship can be more fully disclosed in the interaction between the author, the text, and the reader/listener.

## **1. Locating the discussion on discipleship in the context of Markan studies**

Daniel Harrington points out in his book *What are they Saying about Mark?* that in the last two decades of the twentieth century there was an important change of emphasis in the studies of the Gospel of Mark, "[f]rom the world behind the text (history, sources, etc) to the text itself and to the reader of the text."<sup>72</sup> He affirms that during the twentieth century most scholars approached Mark as a window to the historical Jesus or the life of the Christian community that fashioned the Gospel narrative, making use of historical methods, and source and form criticism. More recently, most Markan scholars seem interested in investigating the text as it is available for us today, taking into consideration the development of the Gospel

---

<sup>71</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *The Journal of Religion* 57 (1977), 386-405,

<sup>72</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *What are they Saying about Mark?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 7.



narrative, how the story is told, and making use of literary theories to unlock the message of the Gospel. Moreover, a number of scholars have asked questions about the relationship between the author and the reader or listener, employing the so called “reader-response criticism.”

When discussing more recent developments in Markan scholarship in his book, Moloney also sees a movement from approaches that have focused their studies on “the world behind the text” (diachronic reading) to methods that center their analysis on “the world in the text” (synchronic reading) and “the world in front of the text.”<sup>73</sup> The newer approaches, according to Moloney, engage in methods developed in the study of modern narratives, “...tracing an implied author’s manipulation of an implied reader by means of characters, plot, descriptions of place, the use of time, and the many other elements of a ‘good story.’”<sup>74</sup>

In a similar perspective, Elizabeth Malbon sees a “paradigm shift” in more recent biblical studies, moving from historical to literary inquiries. According to Malbon, the writer of the Gospel of Mark is no longer regarded as a “cut-and-paste editor,” completely dependent on his sources, but an author who has control over the story being narrated.<sup>75</sup> Reading the Gospel of Mark through this lens, Malbon states:

The Jesus of Mark is no longer a shadowy historical personage but a lively character. Galilee and Jerusalem are no longer simply geographical references but settings for dramatic action. The account of Jesus’ passion (suffering and death) is no longer the source of theological doctrine but the culmination of a dramatic and engaging plot.<sup>76</sup>

Malbon also points out that there is a distinction between *story*, which points to the “content of the narrative” (events, characters, setting which interacts as a plot), and *discourse*, which has to

---

<sup>73</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth S. Malbon, “Narrative Criticism - How Does the Story Mean?,” in *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, eds. Stephen D. Moore and Janice C. Anderson, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 30.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

do with the way the story is told: “Story is the *what* of the narrative and discourse is the *how* of the narrative.”<sup>77</sup>

Moloney also points out the increasing importance of the study of “the *socialpolitical* world that determined the shape of the narrative, its plot, and its characterization.”<sup>78</sup> According to Moloney, the Gospel of Mark describes vividly, through its characters, settings, and plot, the situation of the marginalized people of first century Palestine, the corrupt system reinforced by Jewish leaders, and the ruthless Roman occupation of the their territory.<sup>79</sup> These recent studies not only take the text more seriously but also help the modern audience to study the Gospel story more attentively, paying close attention to the story being told, the manner by which this story is told, and the intended response by the reader.

Another element that I believe is important to consider is that of faith. The text is without doubt a religious text which presents Jesus as the Son of God who proclaims the kingdom of God, calls people to follow him, performs miracles, teaches the mysteries of God’s kingdom, engages in some religious and political controversies, faces persecution, passion and death, and is reported to have been risen. Some of these stories, and especially the event of Jesus’ passion and resurrection, seem to be already known by the first audience of the Gospel. Therefore, the author’s faith, as well as the audience’s experience of faith, needs to be taken into consideration when we study the theme of discipleship in Mark’s Gospel.

With those considerations in mind, we proceed by asking, what role do the disciples play in Mark’s narrative? How do the disciples interact with Jesus and respond to Jesus’ call, teachings, and other demands? Finally, how does the disciples’ role serve to illuminate the concept of Christian discipleship for Mark’s audience? Naturally, in order to elucidate the

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>78</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 10 (his italics).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 10.

Markan concept of discipleship, we need to investigate the role of the disciples in the Gospel narrative.

## **2. Narrative approaches to the disciples and discipleship in Mark**

Beginning with the affirmation that Mark is a narrative and cautiously comparing the Gospel of Mark to a modern novel, Tannehill in his article “The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role” stresses that the author of narrative has “a strong, creative role,” for he/she not only chooses what to tell in the story but also how to tell the story. Moreover, in Tannehill’s view, telling a story involves as much interpretation as writing history.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the author of the Gospel is an active interpreter of the life of Jesus, not a mere passive and neutral editor who only reports events and stories that were handed down to him/her.

Tannehill also affirms that the author has a purpose in telling the story and he/she consciously chooses *how* to tell his/her story. Since there are many possible ways to tell a story, the author’s choices already reveal something about his/her purpose. As Tannehill says, “The narrator chooses the way which fits his purpose or limits his purpose to the narrative forms at his disposal, and so his purposes are mirrored by his stories.”<sup>81</sup> Taking into consideration Tannehill’s ideas, the study of the narrative role of the disciples of Jesus in Mark can shed some light not only on the understanding of the whole story being told in the Gospel but also on the purpose of telling this story and how the audience is expected to respond to it. The act of reading or listening to the Gospel involves not a passive mind that makes the reader/listener a neutral

---

<sup>80</sup> Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark,” 387.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 388.

recipient; rather, it encompasses an active role on the part of the audience to whom is given the charge of figuring out the story and of making sense of it in their lives.

In his short monograph, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, John Donahue states that the Gospel of Mark is primarily concerned with Christology where the story of Jesus, his identity, actions, and teaching are at the forefront of the narrative.<sup>82</sup> Since Donahue does not see major developments of Mark's Christology, especially when comparing Mark's Gospel to the Pauline letters, he affirms that the primary newness of the Gospel rests on *the narrative* of the interaction of "all kinds of people" in the disclosing of Jesus' story. According to him, "The Gospel of Mark tells us not only who Jesus is, but what it is to be involved with him."<sup>83</sup> To be sure, there is a close connection between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom and his disciples. We see that the disciples are introduced into the narrative following Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God in Galilee (1:16-20). Moreover, Jesus not only calls the disciples to follow him, but also summons them to participate in his mission (1:17; 3:14-15; 6:6b-13).

As Donahue rightly points out, considering that Jesus and the proclamation of the kingdom take the forefront of Mark's narrative, the disciples come in the second place in Mark's Gospel. Through the disciples, the first audience of the Gospel is particularly engaged in the narrative since they can share a certain communality in the following of Jesus. In the act of making sense of the story, Mark's audience participates actively in the process of interpretation.

Jesus and the disciples are also discussed by Malbon in light of narrative analysis of characters. First, she affirms that characters serve not only to carry out the story being told, but

---

<sup>82</sup> John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1983), 1-2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

also to serve to make the connection between them and the reader.<sup>84</sup> According to Malbon, “The implied reader of the story-as-discoursed is frequently invited to admire, judge, or identify with the characters.”<sup>85</sup> Along these lines, the author of Mark tells the story in such a way that the reader/listener is called to establish that connection with the characters and to make his or her own judgment about them, especially about Jesus and the disciples. One question can arise, however, regarding how much room the audience has to make their own judgments and choices, considering that the author provides all the information about these characters, explicitly or implicitly.

Second, making use of the novelist and literary critic E. M. Foster’s classification of characters, Malbon affirms that both Jesus and the disciples are “round” characters.<sup>86</sup> In contrast to “flat” characters represented in Mark by the Jewish leaders, whose actions and words are consistent and predictable, “round” characters like Jesus and the disciples are more complex and dynamic, for they can change and reveal new nuances in the narrative. Malbon points out that “round characters elicit identification in a way that flat characters do not.”<sup>87</sup> Certainly, these characters are well elaborated in the Gospel’s narrative, making them complex and thus inviting the audience for reflection.

In the same light, Tannehill goes further and states that unlike other characters in the Gospel of Mark, the disciples, those who follow Jesus, have a continuing relationship with him.<sup>88</sup> They are mentioned already in the first chapter (1:16-20), continue to appear throughout the Markan Gospel in major events (8:27-33; 14:22-25), and are mentioned at the very end (16:7). As the story progresses, there is development in their attitudes, especially in the way they

---

<sup>84</sup> Malbon, "Narrative Criticism," 34.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>88</sup> Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 388.

interact with Jesus. Moreover, Tannehill calls attention to the fact that, in the act of reading a text, the reader always tries to make connections between the various parts of the text.

Consequently, for him, the fact that the disciples appear several times in the story and interact with other characters compels the reader to make necessary connections between these parts, and the reader does that, especially, by using his/her imagination.<sup>89</sup>

This movement of the story from a beginning to an end, passing through different scenes and events, enables the audience to realize a change of relation between the disciples and Jesus. The disciples begin by responding positively to Jesus (1:16-20; 2:13-14), but then their fear and incapacity to understand only increases: they do not understand the meaning of parables (4:13), the stilling of the sea (4:40-41), the feeding of the five thousand (6:52), Jesus' attitude toward children (10:13-14), and the saying about the rich entering the kingdom (10:23). In the end, the disciples forsake Jesus and flee (14:50). Speaking of the connections that the audience makes out of these various episodes, Tannehill states:

The brief scenes in the synoptic Gospels are like pen and ink sketches in which an artist, with only a few strokes, has suggested some forms, relying on the viewer to fill in the rest with his imagination.<sup>90</sup>

It is in this movement of the story that the characters are fully developed and show their complexity, which the audience would not be so much aware of if they did not read/listen to the whole story from beginning to end. The author of Mark, however, is conscious of this development, for he/she chose to write the story in such a way.

Moreover, the author of Mark's Gospel also provides important clues about how the audience should understand the story and react to it. The author, for instance, makes use of repetition to emphasize important elements in the story. As Tannehill points out, Jesus speaks of

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 389.

his coming suffering, death, and resurrection three times; Peter denies Jesus three times; and Jesus feeds the crowd twice, followed by boat stories where the disciples are reported to misunderstand Jesus.<sup>91</sup> These patterns of repetition serve to emphasize important parts of the stories. In addition, the use of dialogue, in Tannehill's view, also indicates emphasis that the author wants to give to a particular scene. A good example of this literary device is the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples about Jesus' identity, followed by Jesus' first announcement of his passion (8:27-33). Many scholars affirm that this episode opens a new literary unit (marked by the three passion predictions) that goes to 10:45, and also marks a turning point in the narrative as a whole.<sup>92</sup>

In agreement with the thinking that the author of Mark uses some literary devices in order to emphasize important elements in the narrative that should not be missed by the audience, Sweetland points out that the disciples' struggles in the second Gospel give Jesus the opportunity to emphasize important teachings and the chance for additional clarification.<sup>93</sup> In Mark's Gospel, for instance, there are three passion predictions (8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34), followed by the disciples' inability to understand their meanings (respectively 8:32; 9:32-33; 10: 35-37), and Jesus' further clarifications about the meaning of his passion and what it means to follow him (8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:38-45). Here, for sure, the literary device of repetition, employed by the author, serves to emphasize the theme of Jesus' passion, and the disciples' failures give Jesus the opportunity for further teaching to the disciples and audience. In addition, 8:22-10:52 is regarded by Markan scholars as the core teaching of the Gospel regarding discipleship. According to Moloney, "More than anywhere else in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus directs his attention and his

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 390.

<sup>92</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 397.

<sup>93</sup> Sweetland, *Our Journey with Jesus*, 83.

teaching toward the disciples...”<sup>94</sup> It is worth noting that in this section the theme of discipleship is developed between two miracle stories dealing with blindness (8:22-26; 10:45-52). For Paul J. Achtemeier, the author of Mark uses the theme of physical blindness as “a symbol of the disciples’ inability to understand.”<sup>95</sup>

Tannehill also notes that the author of Mark makes Jesus the most reliable character and a figure of great authority.<sup>96</sup> In fact, right from the beginning of the Gospel, Mark tells the reader who Jesus is (1:1) and always portrays Jesus in a positive light. Jesus’ predictions, for instance, are always worth trusting for they turn out to be true in the narrative (cf. 7:29-30; 14:27-31, 66-72). Since Jesus is the most reliable figure in the Gospel, the other characters are judged vis-à-vis Jesus’ character. In the mind and imagination of the audience, the characters who listen to Jesus and imitate his actions are positively evaluated. In light of this, Tannehill affirms that the relationship between Jesus and the disciples is worked out very carefully in the Gospel’s narrative.<sup>97</sup> When the disciples follow Jesus’ commands (cf. 2:14) and carry out his words (cf. 6:7-13), they are evaluated positively by the audience. On the other hand, when they fail to fulfill Jesus’ commands (cf. 14:32-42) and separate themselves from him (14:50-52), they are seen in a negative light. Other characters can also be judged by their relationship to Jesus, either by similarity or by contrast. In the case of Jesus’ opponents, the Jewish leaders show resistance to Jesus’ teaching (cf. 2:6) and actions (cf. 11:15-19). And, already in the first miracle story, the people contrast these leaders with Jesus, affirming that Jesus teaches as one who has authority and not as the scribes (1:33).

---

<sup>94</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 172.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Achtemeier’s article on the Bartimaeus’ story for the relation between discipleship, blindness, and the Passion of Jesus. See Paul J. Achtemeier, “And He Followed Him: Miracles and Discipleship in Mark 10:46-52,” *Semeia* 11 (1978), 115-145; and also Joseph B. Tyson’s article on same topic, but with considerably different conclusions, in “Blindness of the Disciples in Mark,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961), 261-268.

<sup>96</sup> Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark,” 391.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 391



It is also important to note that towards the end of the narrative, while the male disciples increasingly fail in their call “to be with Jesus” (3:14) and to accept his teaching about the cross (8:34), other characters appear in the narrative and fulfill the role that should have been done by the disciples: Bartimaeus follows Jesus on his way to the cross (10:52); the widow offers everything that she had, “her whole living” (12:44); an unnamed woman anoints Jesus for his burial (14:8-9); Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus’ cross (15:21); the Roman centurion witnesses Jesus’ last breath and states his true identity as the Son of God (15:39); Joseph of Arimathea provides for Jesus’ burial (15:43-46); and the women followers of Jesus witness Jesus’ death on the cross (15:40-41), and some of them witness his burial (15:47) and are the first to receive the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection (16:1-8). Here, looking to the events of Jesus’ passion, we can affirm that the notion of discipleship in Mark is not limited to the male disciples of Jesus. Although the role of the disciples of Jesus in the Gospel narrative is a preeminent one and is crucial for understanding discipleship in Mark, the role of other characters also helps the audience to understand what Christian discipleship is about. These characters who are present in the passion narrative are examples to be imitated. Their presence in the passion narrative certainly encourages the Christian community to “go up to Jerusalem” and to face their own trials.

Although Markan scholars do not always agree about the place where the Gospel was written or its first audience, most of them affirm that the first audience of Mark’s Gospel consisted mostly of Christian believers.<sup>98</sup> In Malbon’s view, the Gospel of Mark was written by a Christian author who wants Christian readers/listeners to deepen their faith:

The Gospel was written by someone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, assumes that the audience believes that too, and wants to show the

---

<sup>98</sup> See Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 15, and Collins, *Mark*, 96-102.

audience how their life together can be deeper and richer – and how their community can move out into the broader world because of that.<sup>99</sup>

Sharing in the view that the first readers/listeners of Mark were Christians, Tannehill believes that the author of Mark expected that the first audience would relate more easily first to those characters who “respond positively to Jesus.”<sup>100</sup> Once the connection between the audience and the disciples is established, the author speaks directly to the reader/listener of Mark through the disciples’ characters. In the initial part of the story the audience identifies with the positive attitude of the disciples towards Jesus; but as the story proceeds, that identification is challenged to the point of rejection, mainly because along the Gospel narrative the disciples turn out to be unable to understand Jesus and his mission and end up fleeing and abandoning him. In

Tannehill’s words:

[The author] first reinforces the positive view of the disciples which he anticipates from his readers, thus strengthening the tendency to identify with them. Then he reveals the inadequacy of the disciples’ response to Jesus, presents the disciples in conflict with Jesus on important issues and finally shows the disciples as disastrous failures.<sup>101</sup>

The tension created by both the audience’s identification and repulsion toward the disciples serves, according to Tannehill, to create a more self-critical view on the part of the audience, calling them to repentance. Certainly, the power of a good story relies on its capacity to make its audience to reflect and wonder about themselves and the world. In the case of Mark, the issue at stake, posed by the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, leads the Christian readers/listeners to reflect and wonder about how much they are committed to Jesus and the teaching which he not only preaches but also embraces with his own life. The relationship between “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” and its Christian audience is addressed

---

<sup>99</sup> Malbon, *Hearing Mark*, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark,” 392.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

and challenged in the relationship between Jesus and the disciples in the Markan story. In the end, what is important is not so much the failure of the disciples in the Gospel narrative, but how the Christian audience will respond to the challenges posed by Mark vis-à-vis their own historical context.

Examining the role of the disciples in Mark, Best affirms that the author of the second Gospel did not want to attack “the reputation of the historical disciples,” but uses the disciples as a counterpart to Jesus:

[t]heir failure to understand is sometimes introduced in order to allow Jesus to give further and fuller instruction; their fearfulness is brought out in order that Jesus may show them the sources of calm and courage; their desire for positions of importance is stressed in order that Jesus may teach them about the meaning of service.<sup>102</sup>

The emphasis on the failure of the disciples is intended to address the audience of Mark. Even if we concede that the failure of the disciples is historically accurate and is part of the traditions and the sources handed down to the author of Mark, the author still chose to emphasize their failure in the Gospel, instead of softening or omitting it. Historically, it is possible that the first disciples did in fact flee and abandon Jesus during his arrest, failing to understand and accept him as the suffering Messiah, the Son of God, before his resurrection. It seems that the event of the cross was still challenging for the first Christians. Their faith journey, illuminated by God’s intervention in the experience of the resurrection, had to come to terms with the scandal of the cross imposed by the Roman and Jewish leaders and embraced by Jesus the Messiah. Indeed, Mark’s narrative gives meaning to the suffering and death of the Son of Man, helping the first Christians to understand the significance and consequences of it for Christian discipleship.

Best also affirms that Mark sees the disciples as the church and that he did not want to diminish them. For instance, he sees the house-church where the early Christians met reflected

---

<sup>102</sup> Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 128.

positively in Mark's references to the "house" where Jesus instructed his disciples.<sup>103</sup> In the Gospel's story, Jesus very often instructs his disciples εἰς οἶκον (cf. 7:17; 9:28; 10:10). Now, in the house of Mark's community, the Gospel – which contains Jesus' teachings – instructs the first Christians. In fact, there seems to be a positive continuity between the disciples in the Gospel of Mark and the first Christians. Jesus' commission to the Twelve in Mark 3:13-19 is not only carried out in the narrative of the Gospel (6:6b-13), but also in the future life of Christians who will face persecutions because of the name of Jesus (13:9-13). The call and the missionary activity of the disciples seem to be the two most positive portraits of them in the Gospel's story. Discipleship in Mark entails prompt response to the call of Jesus and continuation of his missionary activity. The experience of the cross and God's intervention in Jesus' resurrection are located ahead of the disciples in the story of Mark. However, for the Christians of Mark's community, these events already took place in the past and continue to instruct and support them as the Gospel is read.

The passion of Jesus certainly poses the main challenge for the disciples in the Gospel and also for the Christians of Mark's community. According to Tannehill, the meaning of the passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark presents to discipleship its sharpest problem because:

[f]ollowing the crucified Jesus means taking up the cross oneself (8:34). It also means becoming the slave of all (10:44). These are not demands that disappear after Easter (see the prediction of suffering in 13, 9-13) nor do they suddenly become easy to fulfill.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, while Tannehill insists that we need to pay close attention to Mark's narrative, he affirms that the author's decision to write the second Gospel, telling the story of the failure of disciples in the event of Jesus' passion, relies on his notion that there are important similarities between the situation of these disciples and the early church, so that, "in telling a story about the

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>104</sup> Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 393.

past, the author can also speak to his present.”<sup>105</sup> For him, the first disciples and the early Church both struggle with the event of the cross, which does not disappear with the experience of the resurrection.

Tannehill uses Wolf Iser’s discussion of the role of “negation” in the novel and applies it to Mark’s Gospel.<sup>106</sup> For example, in a novel, an appealing character, who in the beginning shows positive attributes, comes to a bad end because of or despite these qualities. The negative aspects of a novel encourage the reader to reflect on what went wrong and to imagine and produce an alternative. Because of this “negation” of what was previously expected, the reader needs to create a meaning, and so he or she is invited to be involved. Speaking of Mark’s Gospel, Tannehill then states:

The strong negative aspect of the disciples’ story in Mark functions in a similar way, moving the reader to ponder how those called by Jesus could go so far astray and what is required if he is to escape similar failure.<sup>107</sup>

The growing tension that the readers/listeners feel in their relationship with the disciples opens the possibility for critical reflection on their part. As soon as the audience begins to wonder what went wrong with the disciples, they can also ask themselves how they are doing in their relationship with Jesus and his Gospel. Rather than writing a treatise on Christian discipleship, the author of Mark wrote a Gospel story with characters to whom readers/listeners can relate and evaluate. But, in doing so, the readers/listeners are compelled to evaluate themselves as well. In a way, while the audience of the Gospel evaluates the disciples in the story, the characters of the disciples in the story in turn serve to evaluate the audience. For Tannehill,

[t]he reader who was first content to view the disciples as reflections of his own faith and who may have continued to hope for a happy ending to their story must

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 395.

now try to disentangle himself from them, which will mean choosing a path contrary to their path.<sup>108</sup>

Moreover, in the Gospel of Mark, the role of “negation” gives the audience the possibility of distancing themselves from the character of the disciples in order to approximate them with the character of Jesus. According to Tannehill, Jesus is the other possibility that Mark offers for his audience to follow. Jesus represents this positive yet challenging alternative: “He not only calls the disciples to save their lives by losing them and to be servants, but he follows this way himself.”<sup>109</sup> According to Moloney, in the statement of Jesus, “For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45), Mark insists that the life story of Jesus is “the paradigm for all subsequent discipleship.”<sup>110</sup> Consequently, the audience does not have to invent out of nothing an alternative for the failing disciples, because Jesus is the other alternative, the most reliable one. What, perhaps, the audience needs to re/invent is nothing other than themselves. The call to convert and believe in the Gospel is indeed the kerygmatic preaching of Jesus in Mark (1:15).

Although other facets of discipleship are important (the call, community life, prayer, missionary activity), Jesus’ call to deny oneself, take up his/her cross and follow him, remains at the core of a true understanding of discipleship. As we study the Gospel of Mark in terms of the analysis of the narrative, focusing on the role of the disciples in the Markan Gospel story, the teaching about the cross presents itself as both the “stumbling block” and the “corner stone” of discipleship. This central point of the Gospel is not only demanding for the disciples in Mark, but also poses a great challenge for disciples everywhere. It is also difficult to grasp and accept the teaching about the cross, as service, giving up the search for power, and embracing self-

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>110</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 208.

denial, because it is so subversive and contrary to the habitual and perverted logic of the world of fear, selfishness, and greed.

After speaking of Mark as prophet and pastor, Donahue speaks of Mark as poet and offers an excellent précis of the power of Mark's story:

Mark told his church a story which fed their very souls when they met in memory of him who took bread and said, "this is my body" (14:22) and said that a cup of wine was his covenant blood to be poured out for many (14:24). This story was a story better than the stories of war, of family betrayal and of profanation of the Holy City which shaped their lives (13:3-13). It was a story of being called by Jesus, of walking with him, of experiencing love even amid failure and denial and of solidarity with others who were trying to hear the same story.<sup>111</sup>

Certainly, this story still challenges the disciples of Jesus today and empowers them to continue to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The power of Mark's Gospel narrative is still unfolding today as many scholars search to apprehend its meaning and consequences for Christian discipleship. Its power can also be perceived in the life of those who are constantly being challenged and transformed by it and struggle to live out its message. Although Mark's story line is well known by Christians today, it still surprises and engages them as they strive to make sense of it in their own life and circumstances. One of the aspects that make the narrative still appealing and sometimes difficult to understand is the ambivalence and complexity of the character of the disciples. The characters of the disciples in the narrative are still not entirely resolved. If for the most part of the narrative they are presented in a negative light and only grow worse as the narrative evolves, they also show positive features, which contradicts a definitive negative image of them. Mark 10:23-31 shows this positive feature of the disciples. So how should we now read it in light of the overall negative image of the disciples?

---

<sup>111</sup> Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 55-56.

### 3. The place and the teaching of Mark 10:23-31 in the overall Markan narrative.

In her book *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, Suzanne Henderson claims that a dismissive approach to the Gospel of Mark's first half and an overemphasis on Jesus' identity *as such* depict the tendency to forge a sharp distinction between the disciples and Jesus. She upholds that, "... [t]he disciples are not flat foils to Jesus but active, though faltering, participants in the kingdom reality that Jesus both proclaims and enacts."<sup>112</sup> She criticizes interpreters who restrict Mark's Gospel to the question of Jesus' identity and assume that the Gospel predominantly aims to reveal the fact that Jesus is the suffering Messiah. Actually, when the focus of reading Mark is placed heavily upon Jesus' identity, the disciples are judged largely in regard to their acceptance/rejection of his identity as the Suffering Messiah. In turn, other more positive facets of the disciples (like 10:23-31) fade into the background of the overall narrative. In Henderson's view, Mark's Gospel should be read in the broader perspective of God's in-breaking kingdom taking place in Jesus Christ. She states:

When the present Christological inquiry into Mark's gospel expands beyond issues surrounding Jesus' identity as God's anointed one to consider the wider horizon of his kingdom-of-God mission, the disciples emerge as companions and collaborators in that mission, even if imperfectly so.<sup>113</sup>

In fact, interpretive emphasis on the Suffering Messiah has often divided the Gospel sharply into two halves. The first part, seen only as preparatory, portrays Jesus' wonder-working. The second part, seen as the more fundamental of the two, unveils Jesus' true identity as the Suffering Messiah. Some interpreters have even said that Mark is the Gospel of the Passion narrative with an introduction. Moreover, since the disciples forsake and flee from Jesus during

---

<sup>112</sup> Suzanne W. Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13-14.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



his arrest and are not present at the cross to profess that he is indeed the Son of God, their negative image prevails and becomes gloomy. By taking a more expansive horizon of interpretation, Henderson avoids the usual dichotomies that come from an interpretation centered almost exclusively on Jesus' messiahship and the proper faith response to it. She does take seriously the more positive accounts regarding the disciples and seeks to relate the whole of Jesus' ministry to his final destiny, seeking coherence between them instead of competing claims. There is no doubt that in the Gospel of Mark the disciples show themselves to be increasingly unable to grasp the full consequences of Jesus' action and teachings. However, Henderson rightly points out that "...to focus exclusively on their [disciples'] misapprehension of Jesus' messiahship – and particularly his suffering messiahship – is both to define the disciples' incomprehension too narrowly and to ignore the more positive elements of the gospel's portrait of them."<sup>114</sup>

In Mark 10:23-31, Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God in close relation to his following. The disciples' positive response to Jesus' call to follow him makes them participants in the reality of the kingdom, a reality that demands conversion (cf. 1:15), radical comportment (cf. 9:47), and openness and receptivity (cf. 10:14-15). To Follow Jesus is to embrace the power of the kingdom present in him, which also represents a reversal of order (cf. 10:31). Consequently, the disciples should not be evaluated only in reference to their misunderstanding of Jesus' messiahship, but also to their openness to the in-breaking of God's kingdom in Jesus. It can be held that, at least in part, in Mark's narrative the disciples show contradictory responses to the teachings and demands of Jesus and the new reality of the kingdom. On one hand, they show exceptional signs of renunciation, determination, and fellowship. On the other hand, they exhibit signs of misunderstanding, fear, and unrest. Even though the negative signs of their

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 14.

misunderstandings and failures are exacerbated toward the end of the Gospel, they should not cancel the other more positive signs.

Mark 10:23-31 also attests to the fact that the disciples are not “flat” characters whose performance can be easily predicted. They are multifaceted and complex characters, resembling perhaps the paradoxical nature of the Gospel. Their positive portrayal in 10:23-31 makes their character more nuanced. As Malbon has rightly affirmed, because of their complexity, “round” characters draw more identification from the audience. In the case of the disciples, their complex personalities and contradictory responses to the demands of Jesus and the kingdom make them more appealing to the audience.

By stressing the importance of renunciation of possessions (10:17-31) and making the figure of the disciples more paradoxical in the overall narrative, Mark seems to be mostly concerned with telling his audience about the radical demands of Christian discipleship. The disciples’ behavior may be paradoxical, nuanced with positive and negative images, but the demands of Christian discipleship are consistent throughout the narrative. In fact, the necessity of renunciation of possessions to become a follower of Jesus is never contradicted in the story. Its importance is related in the first call narratives (1:16-20; 2:13-14), stressed in the story of the rich man (10:17-22), and confirmed in the dialogue between Peter and Jesus (10:23-31). Moreover, the exemplary stories of Bartimaeus and the poor widow support the importance of renunciation and self-giving in the way of discipleship. Thus, throughout the Gospel Mark is consistent on this theme. Finally, in a section that portrays the disciples mostly negatively (8:22-10:52), the disciples’ positive response to the demand of renunciation of possessions (10:23-31) stands out in the Gospel and thus conveys to the audience the degree of its importance.

Another aspect to be considered about 10:23-31 and its place in the Gospel narrative refers to what the audience already knew about the disciples. Certainly, the author has directed the narrative a great deal in order to fashion the Gospel he wants to tell the audience, but he could have only gone so far. For instance, the author of Mark could not have denied realities that were already well established in his community like the trial and death of Jesus in Jerusalem and the reports of his resurrection. These realities were already established before the author had fashioned his Gospel. Along the same lines, it could be argued that the fact that Mark portrays the disciples in a positive light with regard to their *leaving behind* family and possessions and *following* Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem attests to a reality already accepted by the first audience. Portraying the disciples otherwise would contradict something that the first audience knew as fact. By placing 10:23-31 after the story of the rich man, Mark then highlights the disciples' radical response to Jesus' call.

In conclusion, while the disciples' negative features encourage the audience to distance themselves from them, their positive aspects encourage the audience to imitate their conduct. The disciples' attitude in 10:23-31 sets up examples for the audience to follow. It speaks of the practical meaning of Christian discipleship. It also relates to the dynamic force of the kingdom of God (10:25) that not only promotes a new orientation of one's personal life (10:21) but also changes the world's values (10:23). To become a disciple of Jesus is to embrace the kingdom and its dynamic force that moves people out of their ordinary life and business, and compels them to build a new community, based not on possessions (10:23-31) or power (10:42), but on service (10:43-44) and self-giving (12:43-44), seeking to imitate Jesus in everything (10:45), especially in his total surrender to the Father's will (14:36; 15:39).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Markan discipleship in relation to other contexts**

This chapter will read Markan discipleship, especially its demands found in Mark 10:23-31, in relation to Mark's community and to the corresponding passages in the other Synoptic Gospels (Matt 19:23-30 and Luke 18:24-30). It will also reflect on some theological issues regarding Mark 10:23-31 and the costs and rewards of discipleship. Finally, it will draw some conclusions that this study poses for Christian living today. By relating the theme of this thesis to other contexts, my hope is to deepen its analysis and findings, as well as to raise debate about its actualization.

#### **1. Discipleship in the context of the Markan community**

In recent years, scholars have moved away from reading Mark predominantly as a window to the historical Jesus and the first Christian communities. There has been a change in emphasis from the world behind the text to the text itself and its audience. Great interest has been placed in Mark's narrative and rhetorical composition. Scholars, however, have not lost interest in Mark's historical background. Even some narrative critics suppose and comment a great deal about the socio-political and cultural background of the first Markan audience in order to better elucidate the Gospel's major plot, subplots, and its characterization of personages.

Regarding the historical context of Mark, two major scholarly opinions have developed in recent years. One locates and describes the setting and community of Mark either in Galilee or

in a neighboring area like southern Syria. The other supports the more traditional view and places Mark's community in Rome around the year 69 C.E. Representative of the first opinion, Joel Marcus maintains that the Second Gospel echoes the effects of the First Jewish Revolt (66-74 C.E.), placing the Markan community in geographical and temporal proximity to this devastating and widespread event. In defense of his argument, Marcus writes:

Evidence for this thesis has been found in the "prophecies" of chap. 13, in the contrast in 11:17 between "house of prayer for all nations" and "den of brigands," in the Jew-Gentile theme throughout the Gospel, and in the ambivalent attitude toward Davidic messianism.<sup>115</sup>

Because of the information that Mark provides for an audience not familiar with Jewish customs (cf. 7:3-4; 15:42), Marcus envisions Mark's community as predominantly Gentile and locates it in a Hellenistic city in Palestine.

On the other side, in his article "Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel," John Donahue takes the more traditional view and places the Markan community in Rome after the great fire of 69 C.E. Using the Markan text and some support from outside the Gospel, Donahue tries to track tensions in Mark's narrative rhetoric and to locate them in the context of possible concerns in the Markan community. Following this approach, Donahue concludes that Mark's community suffered persecution, violent executions, and betrayal among family members. Moreover, he perceives that the sufferings of Mark's Roman community are reflected in the Gospel narrative through three main threads: "(1) the shadow of the cross, (2) opposition to Jesus by powerful leaders, and (3) division among Jesus' followers brought on by suffering."<sup>116</sup> Finally, Donahue states that the Gospel of Mark is both "window" and "mirror" in

---

<sup>115</sup> Joel Marcus, "The Jewish War and the *Sitz Im Leben* of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992), 410.

<sup>116</sup> John R. Donahue, "Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995), 9.

the sense that “[i]t does reflect events outside the community, while it summons its readers to reflect on their own lives.”<sup>117</sup>

Although using different methods and arriving at different conclusions, both Marcus and Donahue are aware of the limits of their studies and affirm that they are only tentative. In fact, the place, the date of composition, and the setting of Mark are still highly debated and scholarly consensus has not been reached. There are still other contemporary scholars who think that this endeavor should be abandoned, for in their view it is highly speculative and does not help to interpret the text. Mark’s narrative plot, however, offers to its audience a clear geographical and temporal plot, staging the story in first century Palestine during the Roman occupation. Moreover, the fact that Mark’s narrative and audience lived in the context of the Roman Empire of the first century should not be ignored. The study of this historical context should prove useful, helping today’s interpreters to better access Mark’s message. Lastly, although uncertainties about Mark’s community setting remain, there is general agreement among scholars that Mark’s community was undergoing hardships and suffering.

Locating the situation of Palestine in the context of the Roman Empire, Richard A. Horsley states:

[s]ociety in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere in the Roman empire, was sharply divided, mainly between the powerful and wealthy rulers, on the one hand, and the mass of people on the other. Movements of protest or even rebellion persistently emerged among the people.<sup>118</sup>

Moreover, he emphasizes that Galileans and Judeans had been subjected to foreign empires for many centuries. In his view, during the time of Jesus’ movement, the Roman imperial rule, king Herod’s governance, as well as the temple–state and high priesthood formed three levels of

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>118</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), x.

dominance over the people. Furthermore, each structure of power demanded economic revenues to keep it running, aggravating the situation of the people in the margins. Analyzing more specifically the situation of Galilee, the birthplace of Jesus' ministry in Mark, Horsley estimates that:

During the lifetime of Jesus, the Rome-imposed ruler Herod Antipas must have intensified the economic exploitation of the Galileans in order to fund his massive building projects, the two capital cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias.<sup>119</sup>

It is within this historical context that Mark tells the good news about Jesus the Messiah (1:1). He portrays Jesus as proclaiming that the time of the kingdom of God has arrived, and as calling his audience to repent and believe in the good news (1:15). Further, the Markan Jesus juxtaposes the way of the Gentile rulers and the way of his disciples, contrasting influence and desire for power with service and self-giving (10:42-43). Mark's Gospel informs his community, who lives under the power of the Roman Empire, about the unexpected and astonishing way of Christian discipleship within the realm of God's reign. Mark's narrative is indeed εὐαγγέλιον not only because it develops the meaning of Jesus' messiahship in terms of correct faith, but also because it challenges the structures of power known by Jesus and Mark's audience. The arrival of God's reign reverses the world's common values and calls people to a new life (10:21). In Mark, following Jesus is a response to this new world order brought about by Jesus' proclamation and enacting of the kingdom, though the disciples in the narrative do not always understand and accept these demands.

To be sure, discipleship in Mark should not be formulated by abstracting and divorcing the disciples' story from the overall narrative, leaving out its relationship with other major themes of the Gospel, such as the arrival of the kingdom of God. It is within the whole narrative

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 36.

and in consideration of its historical context that the meaning of discipleship emerges more fully, accurately, and challengingly.

Therefore, Mark 10:17-31 should be read against the first century Palestine scenario marked by economic exploitation, political oppression, sharp class division, and constant public unrest. Knowing the reality during the time of Jesus and its own reality, Mark's audience has a better understanding of Jesus' demand for the rich man to sell his possessions, give them to the poor, and follow him. Accessing the reality of Palestine during the time of Jesus and the context of Mark's community under the Roman Empire makes more clear what wealthy means in a world plagued by poverty and economic oppression. Further, Jesus makes clear that entering the kingdom of God is indeed a difficult endeavor (cf. 10:23-27) that requires a new way of living (cf. 10:28-31). Living in the context of the Roman Empire, Mark's community, depicted in the figure of the disciples, is called to live in consonance with the new values of the εὐαγγέλιον, forming an alternative community based not in possessions but in sharing and service.

Considering Donahue's view that Mark's narrative says something about the community behind the Gospel, there is no doubt that distress and suffering had been part of Mark's original audience. The paradox of the cross, embraced by Jesus and taught to the disciples (cf. 8:34-35), speaks of the risk of being a herald of the kingdom and the consequences of radical discipleship in a world hostile to the values of the εὐαγγέλιον. PHEME PERKINS also points out that:

What the Gospel itself says about Jesus' disciples in the future highlights suffering. The apocalyptic prophecy of 13:9-13 warns of persecution. Christians must expect to be dragged before Jewish and non-Jewish authorities because of their testimony to the gospel. But the conflict will not stop there. Family members will also turn against Christians.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> PHEME PERKINS, *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 155.



In Jesus' response to Peter's remark concerning the first disciples' renunciation of possessions, Mark poignantly adds "with persecution" to the rewards promised for this age (10:30), thus already anticipating these harsh consequences. Citing Jesus' interpretation about the failure of seed on rocky ground that lacks roots as an image for those who fall away because of trouble or persecution (4:17), Perkins comments on 10:30 and concludes:

When Jesus assures Peter that the disciples will recover all they gave up to follow him, he tucks in the fact that they can also expect persecutions (10:30). With such a consistent emphasis on suffering for the gospel, the stories of how fearful Jesus' disciples were show that the Evangelist does not ignore the human difficulties involved.<sup>121</sup>

Certainly, Mark does not ignore the suffering that his own community is enduring because of their receptivity of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, made real in their faithful discipleship of Jesus. These passages serve to address these issues, relating them with the whole Gospel story.

## **2. The teaching of Mark 10:23-31 in relation to Matthew 19:23-30 and Luke 18:24-30.**

The teaching of Mark 10:23-31 is found, for the most part, in Matthew and Luke. In both cases, the teaching is preceded by the story of the rich man. Matthew and Luke follow closely Mark's arrangement (10:17-22; 23-27; 28-31), and their version can be also divided into three sub-units: 1) Jesus' encounter with the rich (additionally characterized as "young man" in Matt 19:16-22 and as a "certain ruler" in Luke 18:18-23); 2) his radical teaching regarding wealth (Matt 19:23-26 and Luke 18:24-26); and 3) Jesus' promises of rewards (Matt 19:27-30 and Luke 18:24-30). There is a significant difference in the Lukan version since it never says that the rich youth departs from Jesus, thus implying that he hears Jesus' further teaching on wealth (cf. Luke

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 155.

18:24-25). Although the story line is similar in all the Synoptics, there are considerable differences between these accounts, revealing important features of each author's overtone aimed, likely, at their particular audience.

Regarding the story of the rich man, Matthew adds the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (cf. Lev 19:18) in Jesus' reply to the young rich man. Moreover, Matthew omits the odd commandment "Do not defraud" (cf. Matt 19:18-19) found in Mark. Matthew also adds, "If you would be perfect" in 19:21, implying that if the man wishes to be perfect, he needs to go a step further (besides keeping the commands in vv. 18-19, which already guarantee his entrance to life) and sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow him. In the second unit, Matthew excludes the more general saying of Jesus in Mark 10:24, thus keeping the difficulty about entering the kingdom of heaven more specifically for a rich person (cf. Matt 19:23-24). In the third unit Matthew has Jesus answering Peter's question on two levels: first, a special promise to the Twelve is made (Matt 19:28); second, a promise is made for all the disciples who have renounced family and possessions for the sake of Jesus' name (Matt 19:29). Jesus' promise to the Twelve who have followed him is directed to the future apocalyptic judgment, when they will share in Jesus' authority and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. For all the disciples who have renounced family and possessions, Jesus promises a hundredfold (without more details) and entrance to eternal life, which, in the end, seems to be what is emphasized.

According to Daniel Harrington, Matthew gives more importance to the reward for discipleship in the age/world to come and binds this with the destiny of all Israel.<sup>122</sup> The Twelve disciples, who were chosen by Jesus as representatives of Israel's twelve tribes and have left everything behind and followed Jesus, will preside at the judgment of all Israel at the *eschaton*. The Twelve have a more positive representation throughout Matthew's narrative (especially

---

<sup>122</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 1 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), 279.

when compared to Mark), therefore their character becomes more exemplary for Matthew's community. Harrington rejects the contrast usually made between the Jewish belief of wealth as a blessing from God upon the righteous and the Christian ideal of renunciation of material goods for the sake of the kingdom. Citing the Qumran Essenes' practice of voluntary renunciation of possessions, as well as the prophetic and wisdom tradition found in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Ezek 7:19; Prov 15:16; 30:8-9, and Sirach 31:5-7), Harrington shows that renunciation of possessions was not utterly alien to first-century Judaism and that the teaching about the dangers of wealth was already part of Jewish belief. Jesus' teaching on wealth found in Matt 19:23-30 could have been drawn from his Jewish tradition and historical context. Moreover, the important changes that Matthew made in the story of the rich man, such as the addition of the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" and the phrase "If you wish to be perfect," prefacing Jesus' imperative in 19:21, seem to make the demands of renunciation connected to a more perfect observance of the Torah thus, perhaps, more reasonable for his Jewish Christian audience. Matthew's Jesus does not have to look outside the Jewish tradition to uphold the importance of the renunciation of possessions to be perfect, or even to enter eternal life. Rather, he calls for taking the Torah more seriously, for living out its commandment of loving one's neighbor. The Twelve then become exemplary of this attitude and thus they will share in Jesus' authority of judging Israel.

While Matthew emphasizes the relationship between the teaching of Jesus and the Jewish tradition regarding the renunciation of possessions, in addition to the prominent role that the Twelve will have in the eschaton, Mark ties the demands of renunciation of possessions in Christian discipleship to the reversal of the world order brought by the arrival of the kingdom of God, and the paradox of the cross, which highlights Jesus' service and self-giving. Both

Evangelists, however, do not avoid this theme in the discipleship of Jesus or downplay its importance, but they approach it according to their own theological agenda and community situation.

Turning to Luke, it is important to point out that Jesus has already made clear in 10:25-37 (the story of the Good Samaritan) that observing the commandments of love of God and love of neighbor leads to eternal life. Now Luke indicates that another way of entering the kingdom of God is by abandoning all possessions, giving them to the poor, and following Jesus. Although Luke makes few changes to Mark 10:17-31, they are significant. Here we will discuss some of the changes made.

Luke characterizes the man who comes to Jesus first as ἄρχων (a ruler) and, eventually, as πλούσιος σφόδρα (extremely rich). By classifying the man as a ruler, Luke places him more clearly in the social structure of Jesus' time (cf. 23:13, 35), identifying him as a religious ruler like Jairus (8:41). In Luke, Jesus also tells the ruler more explicitly to sell *all* (πάντα) that he owns and to give to the poor (18:22). In 18:29, Luke makes the link with Jesus' demands to the rich ruler by having Peter state, "We have left *all we had*" (τὰ ἴδια).

Tannehill points out that Luke constantly pictures religious leaders as people who exalt themselves (11:43; 14:7-11; 16:15; 18:9-14) and as greedy rich people who neglect the poor (11:39-41; 14:12-14; 16:14, 19-31).<sup>123</sup> Although this religious ruler is a sincere seeker, his attachment to wealth prevents him from becoming one of Jesus' disciples. However, the disciples and all who have left possessions and family for the sake of the kingdom show themselves apt for Jesus' radical call to discipleship. The contrast is then made between the

---

<sup>123</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1990), 187.

wealthy religious ruler and the disciples, and it reinforces the view that Jesus' movement breaks off with the existing social structure.

Donald Kraybill and Dennis Sweetland also see that the historical disciples of Jesus, by leaving behind their possessions and following their wandering leader, break with the existing economic and political order and offer glimpses of "the rudimentary and enthusiastic phase of a social movement"<sup>124</sup> led by Jesus. They argue that the memory of Jesus' prophetic movement is retained mostly in the Gospel, which constantly speaks about the dangers of wealth and often speaks of renunciation of all possessions (12:33; 14:26-33; 18:22). However, Acts pictures a different stage in the Jesus movement, when the Church's "primitive communism" replaces the command to "sell and give to the poor." Kraybill and Sweetland write that, in Acts:

Apparently property rights were only given up when a need arose within the community. No longer do we find alms being given to the general poor; now we find that one's possessions must be shared with the community itself as needed.<sup>125</sup>

Acts 2:41-47, 4:32-37, and 5:1-11 corroborate this analysis. Therefore, the demand of renunciation of possessions for Christian discipleship present during the itinerant ministry of Jesus is replaced by the communality among Christians in a more structured organization, i.e., the Church.

Luke 18:18-30 surely endorses the radical character of the discipleship of Jesus present in Mark 10:17-31. By further characterizing the rich man as a religious ruler, Luke contrasts more sharply the dominant structure of the economic and religious order with the prophetic movement of Jesus and his disciples displayed in their simple, vulnerable, and itinerant life-style.

Moreover, it is in Luke's whole narrative that the demand for renunciation of possessions becomes more evident and accentuated, for it is repeatedly taught in different passages (cf. Luke

---

<sup>124</sup> Donald B. Kraybill and Dennis M. Sweetland, "Possessions in Luke-Acts: A Sociological Perspective," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 10 (1983), 216.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

5:1-11, 27-32; 12:16-21; 19:8) and parables (cf. 12:13-21; 16:19-31). Considering that Jesus prophetically proclaims in the beginning of Luke that he has come to proclaim good news to the poor (cf. 4:18), the renunciation of possessions appears to point towards a solidarity with the poor and the society's outcast. Finally, the comparison between Luke and Acts about possessions demonstrates that as Christianity developed and increased in numbers, the demands of Christian discipleship also evolved and suffered considerable changes. Perhaps the more radical character is better preserved in Mark since it does not show these changes.

### **3. Theological issues regarding Mark 10:23-31 and the costs and rewards of discipleship**

While studying Mark from literary perspectives and other methods of analysis, it should not be forgotten that the author wrote a religious text. He introduces his narrative as the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God (Mark 1:1). He does not write a body of laws or doctrine, or a treatise, or a body of sayings for his audience, but a Gospel story. Although Mark certainly uses sources that were already circulating during his time, he uses them and creates a challenging and captivating narrative. In general, scholars agree that Mark wrote to a Christian audience, which already had some familiarity with the preaching of Jesus and the events regarding his suffering, death, and resurrection. Yet Mark creates a narrative that engages his audience and stirs their participation through imagination, reflection, and, perhaps, discussion. It is in the encounter of the author, text, and audience that meaning is generated. A good story is certainly not only the author's story, but also his/her audience's. Both author and audience share some communality that makes the communication possible. One important aspect of their communality is their faith experience, their theological outlook and reading of the world. Thus,

we now will turn to Mark to investigate the author's theological perspectives, keeping in mind that the text is a Gospel, i.e., "good news" meant to affect the lives of its audience. While studying some features of Mark's theological view, we will make connections to the passage of Mark 10:23-31.

There is no doubt that the major character in Mark's narrative is Jesus, who is identified right from the beginning as the Messiah, the Son of God. After this short introduction (1:1) and description of the role of John the baptizer, Mark narrates the first events of Jesus' life, his baptism, his forty days' stay and temptation in the desert, and the call of his disciples. Then Mark tells some stories about Jesus' healing power and authority over unclean spirits. Jesus is a character in constant action who attracts, from the beginning, astonishment (1:22), amazement (1:27), fame (1:28), crowds (1:32, 45; 2:2, 13; 3:7), controversies (2:7; 16, 18, 24), and even a conspiracy against himself (3:6). Although various passages mention that Jesus attends synagogue and preaches (1:21; 1:27; 1:38-39; 2:2; 2:13; 3:1), very little is said about the content of his teaching until the parable of the Sower in chapter four. It seems that his actions are in fact the content of his teaching (1:27), for they manifest God's power that defeats evil and brings healing. The narrative's fast rhythm gives a sense of urgency to what Jesus is doing. His journeys (by land and sea) throughout Galilee and the surrounding Gentile territory add constant movement to the story. In addition, Jesus' dramatic journey to Jerusalem gives the story a strong sense of purpose since the main character faces only one direction, i.e., the city of Jerusalem (and the crucial event of the cross). Jesus' three passion predictions during this journey increase considerably the narrative's drama, for they anticipate the tragic events that will take place there and reveal openly his disciples' increasing failures and misunderstandings concerning the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death. Mark slows down the pace of his narrative only in

Jerusalem, when he narrates the centrality of the event of Jesus' suffering, death on the cross, and resurrection.

Because of Jesus' leading role in the Gospel narrative, there is little doubt that Mark is primarily concerned with the meaning of his life, death, and resurrection for his audience. It is then *the whole* of Jesus' life that the audience should consider, reflect upon, and draw implications for their Christian living. It is *the whole* of Jesus' life that is "good news." The εὐαγγέλιον of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, does not concern only the correct assertion of Jesus' identity and titles, but the significance of his identity and titles as they are revealed in his entire story, which involves his entire way of being: his preaching, healing, conflicting, making disciples, journeying from place to place, serving, and giving his life. Considering that Jesus' important titles (Messiah and Son of God) are already stated in the first line of the Second Gospel, what the author seeks to tell his audience is *how* Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Consequently, the readers/listeners who follow the whole story, from beginning to the end, and are the constant companions of Jesus, are told by Mark's narrative *how* they become his disciples.

Since Jesus has the leading role in Mark's narrative, all the other characters are judged vis-à-vis him. The characters of the rich man and the disciples in Mark 10:17-31 are not only contrasted with one another, but most importantly, they are evaluated according to their response to Jesus' demands. Why should the rich man and the disciples renounce possessions and even family relationships? It is because they are called to establish a new radical relationship with Jesus who manifests the reign of God in the world. Moreover, Jesus himself seems to have no possessions of his own, and appears to have renounced family ties (3:21, 31-35). The wandering character of Jesus (who journeys throughout Galilee and its surroundings, and then makes his



way to Jerusalem) and his unpretentious life style set the example for the rich man and the disciples. Moreover, Jesus' mission based on service and willingness to give his life for many (10:45) gives the ultimate model of total renunciation and openness to the Father. In short, in Mark, one should renounce possessions in order to establish a new relationship with Jesus, who never demonstrated interest in the power and riches of the political and economic structures of his time (cf. 10:42-43), but in serving people through preaching, miracles, healing, and exorcisms, to the point of giving his life for all.

The story of Jesus takes the forefront in Mark's Gospel and is not isolated from its religious context, but it is informed by it. Indeed, Jesus' story is developed in the framework of the story of the Jewish people, the expectation of the advent of the Messiah, and the arrival of God's Kingdom. Mark declares that Jesus is the *Messiah*, the *Son of God*, who announces the kingdom of God by his words and deeds. In fact, Jesus does not act by himself but in close relationship with God, whom he often calls Father (8:38; 11:25; 13:32; 14:36). In key passages, Mark also makes clear for his audience that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (1:1; 8:29), and this is confirmed during Jesus' trial and death on the cross (14:61-62; 15:39). In Mark, as the narrative progresses toward the cross and resurrection, the audience is led to understand the significance of Jesus' special relationship with God, who calls him "my Son" (1:11; 9:7a) and commands the disciples (and the audience!) to listen to him (9:7b). Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection encapsulate his total commitment to the Father. In his prayer to the Father in Gethsemane, Jesus states the Father's sovereignty and accepts his will (14:46). Speaking of this exceptional relationship between Jesus and God, Donahue summarizes in the following:

Even though he is the beloved son (1:11; 9:7, *agapētos* with the nuance of "only"), Jesus does not know the secrets of the father (13:32) and stands in obedience to his will (14:36) Yet, to receive Jesus is not simply to receive him, but the one who sent him (9:37) and his life, teaching and death are given to those

near him as "the mystery of the kingdom of God" (4:11). Jesus, then, does not simply stand before the mystery of God, he embodies it and can be called "the parable of God" who summons the hearers or readers of the gospel to open their ears and hearts to "the good news of God" (1:14-15).<sup>126</sup>

Mark's community is the fruit of the faithful relationship between Jesus and the Father. In the beginning of his ministry, looking at those who were sitting around him, Jesus declares, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (3:35). Doing God's will generates a new family relationship with Jesus. Later, when teaching about the renunciation of possessions, Jesus recognizes the formation of this new community of his disciples who have renounced everything (possessions and family ties) because of him and the Good News. This new community will not lack recognition, but will receive its mixed rewards: "Jesus said, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms because of me and because of the Good News who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (10:29-30).'"

Still, concerning Jesus' relationship with the Father, we see that, as in Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, the sovereignty of God is also stated in Mark 10:27. Replying to the astonished disciples who were questioning among themselves about Jesus' logion that overturns the common religious ideology (cf. 10:25), Jesus affirms that, "[f]or human beings, it is impossible, but not for God. For everything is possible for God." In fact, "everything is possible for God," including the creation of a new world order, based not on wealth and power, but on God's will. The true disciples of Jesus should not doubt but accept God's sovereignty. Following of Jesus

---

<sup>126</sup> John R. Donahue, "A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982), 593.

signals a complete surrender to God's will, since it renounces the power that wealth allegedly provides. Finally, Jesus Christ does not call the disciples to positions of lordship (10:42-43), but to a life of service (10:44) that resembles his own life (10:45), grounded in complete trust in the sovereignty of the Father.

The whole activity of Jesus is a proclamation and realization of God's in-breaking rule. Jesus' activity promotes a radical transformation of all relationships. The kingdom of God embodied in Jesus enacts a series of reversals. For instance, in the political dimension, Jesus teaches that power needs to give way to service (9:35). In the economic realm, wealth no longer ensures inheritance to eternal life (10:21). Sharing with those in need is the new order (cf. 6:35-43; 8:3-7). In addition, human life is more valuable than possessions (5:16-17). In foretelling of the destruction of the Temple, Jesus condemns the religious order that usurps the vulnerable (12:38-40). Finally, in this new dynamic of the Kingdom, 10:17-31 is a "parable" of reversal of the kingdom. In order to participate in the new dynamic of the kingdom of God, the rich must go beyond the fulfillment of the law, sell everything, and share it with the poor. The rich need to become poor, and thus dependent and open to receive, for "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it (10:15)." It is by giving away everything and becoming a disciple of Jesus that a person may receive a hundredfold now in this age and in the age to come eternal life. It is only by becoming last that a person will be first. The invitation to become a disciple of Jesus is indeed an invitation to become Christ-like, one who renounces everything and is totally committed to the Father's will.

In conclusion, the author of Mark, by fashioning a narrative centered on the character of Jesus, makes important connections for his audience. Jesus is the long expected Jewish Messiah, who manifests the kingdom of God by word and mighty deeds, doing everything well (cf. 7:37).

In addition, Jesus is the Son of God who undertakes seriously the Father's will and gives his life as a sign of service and as a ransom for many. Jesus the Messiah and Son of God calls disciples to follow him. Whoever accepts the demands of his discipleship is joining the kingdom of God marked by reversals (10:31) and will receive rewards in *this time* and *in the age to come* (10:30).

In Mark, Jesus' story is interwoven with the story of the in-breaking of the rule of God, and with the story of the disciples. It is this whole story that is εὐαγγέλιον (good news) for Mark's audience, a faith narrative that stands in conflict with the predominating narrative of the Roman Empire and the religious authorities of Israel. While for the rich Mark's narrative seems radical and very challenging, for the marginalized it really sounds like "good news."

#### **4. Some conclusions for Christian life.**

It is important to keep in mind that Mark's portrayal of the disciples and his understanding of the concept of Christian discipleship are not free from interests and bias, since the Gospel he wrote is first aimed at a particular audience: Mark's implied readers. Moreover, Mark's understanding of discipleship is not the only model applicable for Christians. Today's followers of Jesus need to access the meaning of discipleship from the various New Testament (NT) writings, whose authors convey their understanding differently, according to their theological framework and agenda, and vis-à-vis their audiences' *Sitz im Leben*. Most Christians today seem to ignore the different perspectives regarding discipleship, already present in the very beginning of the Church. Moreover, they tend to think of discipleship as one grand all-encompassing concept free from nuances and tensions. Often times, the Church contributes to this understanding when she assumes and preaches a neat line of continuity from the "historical

disciples,” their portrayal in the various NT writings, and the development of the concept of discipleship in history, to teachings of the Church today. It is too simplistic and problematic to create one grand narrative for the meaning of Christian discipleship, not allowing for different and conflicting voices already present in the NT writings to be heard today. Therefore, a thorough study of discipleship in the various NT writings would be very beneficial for individual Christians and their communities today. They would thus be able to grasp more significantly the complex, challenging, and stimulating aspects of discipleship of Jesus. The early different, nuanced, and often paradoxical portrayal of the disciples reflected in the NT can be a stimulating starting point for Christians to recover important aspects of discipleship of Jesus and its challenges and rewards.

Familiarity with the first Christians’ historical setting is certainly crucial in such an endeavor. However, as narrative critics have successfully argued, when reading the NT, especially the Gospels, greater consideration should be given to the entire text, paying close attention to their whole narrative. Very often, Christian audiences today only hear fragments of the NT, and few hear/read the whole story, thus missing much of the meaning of discipleship that is created in the imagination of the audience when the whole story is being proclaimed. To this point, the study of the Gospel of Mark can be very fruitful, for it has a fast-paced narrative with a surprising story line, which can still easily captivate the audience. Furthermore, because Mark’s Gospel seems to have influenced other NT authors, especially the Matthew and Luke, it can be a great starting point for a fruitful dialogue with the other NT writings regarding Christian origins: its early community issues and theological perspectives.

One cannot stress too much the importance of reading Mark as Gospel *story* in order to appreciate the narrative nature of the text. As Malbon rightly points out:

Perhaps Greek philosophers worried about the essence of God, but Jewish and Jewish-Christian storytellers focused on the activity of God and God in Christ. In the biblical tradition not only have the people of God imagined their relationship with God as a story, but also individual members continue to experience their own lives as stories. Perhaps this is why it is so easy for us to get caught up in the story Mark's Gospel tells.<sup>127</sup>

Exposing today's Christian audience to Mark as a Gospel *story* can help them to get involved in the narrative in a way that previously approaches have not succeed in doing. Many people today are still eager to hear a good story, and Mark can deliver a good story that engages and stirs the power of creative imagination. To be sure, Horsley's considerations about the difference between ancient and modern audiences need to be seriously considered:

Modern Western readers tend to assume that Mark is addressed to individual private readers. Many of those who have recently discovered Mark as literature assume that it is to be read like modern prose fiction, with all the presuppositions of modern print culture. In the ancient Roman empire, however, only a tiny percentage of people could read, and printed books did not exist. Mark's story, therefore, was composed in an oral communication environment and would originally have been repeatedly performed orally to communities of listeners.<sup>128</sup>

Consequently, Mark's modern audience will gain great profit when hearing the Gospel together as a community of listeners. The community experience of studying Mark (and the Bible in general) in a highly individualistic world can underline the counter-cultural nature of Christianity that goes back to its origins. Finally, the narrative of Mark's Gospel can offer an alternative narrative for a modern audience to live by, and help them to critically evaluate other "grand narratives" of the contemporary world.

Turning to the actualization of Mark 10:23-31 and its teaching on discipleship, some important considerations can be made at least on three levels.

---

<sup>127</sup> Malbon, *Hearing Mark*, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, xi

On the *global level*, both the assertion of Jesus about the difficulty for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (10:25) and his promise of rewards for those who have left everything behind and followed him (10:29-30) offer an important critique of today's way of living that is largely based on *consumption*. In fact, the world's *consumerist culture* offers a narrative that promises happiness based on the acquisition of material goods and the images attached to them. This consumerist culture is the motor of an economic model that favors mostly large transnational corporations that controls social media and, to a great extent, even governments. The globalization of this model of economy fosters inequity, increasing the gap between rich and poor. Speaking of the negative factors of globalization, the Latin American bishops in their last Conference in Aparecida stated:

Led by a tendency that prizes profit and stimulates competition, globalization entails a process of concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few, not only of physical and monetary resources, but especially of information and human resources.<sup>129</sup>

Indeed, the modern world is deeply and sadly marked by huge economic inequities. Small elites control huge amounts of wealth, while large populations live in poverty, lacking basic human needs.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, the economic model based on *consumerism* is depleting the earth's natural resources and thereby jeopardizing the living conditions of our planet.<sup>131</sup> In the ancient world, Mark's first audience read/listened to his Gospel narrative in their historical context, dominated

---

<sup>129</sup> CELAM - Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean - Concluding Document* (Bogotá, Colombia: Centro de Publicaciones del CELAM, 2008), n. 62.

<sup>130</sup> These two recent articles speak of the concentration of wealth in the hand of the elites of the United States and abroad: Derrick Z. Jackson, "Surprise, Surprise: Rich Get Richer," *Boston Globe*, [http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2011/04/12/surprise\\_surprise\\_rich\\_get\\_richer/](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2011/04/12/surprise_surprise_rich_get_richer/) (accessed 4/12/2011, 2011), and Chrystia Freeland, "The Rise of the New Global Elite," *The Atlantic Magazine*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2011/01/the-rise-of-the-new-global-elite/8343/> (accessed 4/12/2011, 2011).

<sup>131</sup> The Latin American bishops address the challenges that the environment faces and affirms that, "The region is affected by the warming of the earth and climate change caused primarily by unsustainable way of life of industrialized countries." See CELAM, *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean - Concluding Document*, n. 66.

by the Roman Empire elites and the economic system that upheld their power. Mark's modern audiences face their own challenges and are called to respond to them. Mark 10:17-31 speaks to the heart of the question of wealth, challenging the rich, calling them to renounce their possessions and follow Jesus if they want to be part of the kingdom of God movement. This story still needs to be proclaimed with all its power, for it is the good news of Jesus Christ. It asks the rich to re-orient themselves to a new way of life and economic order, based not on accumulation, but on service. The power of the story should not be silenced, downplayed, or relegated to a peripheral teaching of Jesus as if it has little to do with the whole Gospel. It is in fact a radical Gospel story that needs to be told over and over again, because it speaks of the challenging and surprising ways of the Kingdom in a vivid and practical way. Certainly, Mark 10:17-31 is a "small parable" of the Kingdom's reversal. The fact that it still challenges its audience today demonstrates its enduring power. Today's inequitable world needs to hear its message and be confronted by it.

On a *community level*, Mark 10:23-31 poses particular challenges for wealthy Christian communities of today. For them, the call of Jesus, "Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor (...) and follow me" should be taken seriously. The Christian community should not be a place of wealth, luxury, and ostentation, but a place of true encounter with Jesus Christ, where true solidarity with the poor is evident. Certainly, Jesus' request to the rich that he give to the poor is not a symbolic action, but a real action that addresses the injustices of his time, revealing that his discipleship has practical consequences in the economic realm. Moreover, in the Gospel of Mark, Christian communities are called to be communities of service and self-sacrifice for others, not communities of self-indulgence and power (10:42-45). As the first disciples were summoned by Jesus and participated in his mission of preaching, healing the sick,



and drawing out unclean spirits, today's disciples are called to continue Jesus' missionary activity of bringing life to the world. In order to do that, Christian communities need to have a clear plan of action illuminated by Jesus' life and teaching. Otherwise they run the risk of losing their identity as Christian communities and getting lost on other roads that do not lead ultimately to generosity, self-giving, and resurrection. Finally, it is noteworthy that, in Mark, the community of the missionary disciples is not marked by wealth, but by missionary poverty, showing solidarity with their brothers and sisters by sharing in their life's situation (6:8-10).

On the *personal level*, Mark makes clear that one does not become a disciple of Jesus by merely fulfilling religious laws. Rather, one must respond positively to Jesus' invitation to follow him. Discipleship requires a deep *personal experience* with Jesus who summons his disciples, calls them to journey with him, makes them missionaries of the good news, and forms with them a new family. In Mark, discipleship of Jesus is a dynamic experience characterized by being a *follower of Jesus on the way* to his paschal mystery. Often times, discipleship today is characterized in the more static model of "master/student" or in terms of "believer." Markan discipleship, however, requires dis-placement, calling people to move beyond their comfort zone. Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms that, "To be a Christian is to walk, moved by the Spirit, in the footsteps of Jesus. Traditionally known as *la sequela Christi*, this kind of discipleship is the root and the ultimate meaning of the preferential option for the poor."<sup>132</sup> Moreover, the Latin American Bishops state that, "It is our very adherence to Jesus Christ that makes us friends of the poor and unites us to their fate."<sup>133</sup> Following Jesus is an experience that leads us to the poor and neglected of the world. In addition, it demands following Jesus in the way to self-giving. It is a journey towards complete self-surrender to God, led by Jesus who goes ahead of all (10:32).

---

<sup>132</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ," *Theological Studies* 70 (2009), 319.

<sup>133</sup> CELAM - Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean - Concluding Document*, n. 257.

Finally, Mark 10:17-31 does not give a simple answer or a set of rules for a person to become a disciple of Jesus; instead, it invites him/her to a life changing experience that the first disciples of Jesus have embarked on, thus becoming an example for others to follow.

In conclusion, the teaching of discipleship in Mark, especially the teaching about renunciation of possessions in 10:17-31, can be applied on different levels that are not separated from each other but intrinsically connected. The demands of following Jesus pervade each and every dimension of human life. The call of discipleship in Mark is surely radical, but it can generate a new, more abundant, and meaningful life for all.

## CONCLUSION

I hope this thesis has clarified that, even though from a literary point of view the story of the disciples in Mark's Gospel is a story of failure, especially with regard to Jesus' passion, failure is not the whole story. The Markan portrayal of the disciples is not completely negative, but nuanced with positive features. Mark 10:23-31 offers an important positive image of the disciples and highlights that renunciation of possessions is a fundamental aspect of Christian discipleship. The rather positive image of the disciples in Mark 10:23-31 is in consonance with earlier portrayals of the disciples (cf. 1:16-20; 2:13-17) and with other passages that demonstrate exemplary discipleship based on renunciation of material possessions and self-giving (10:50-52; 12:44). Jesus' teaching in 10:23-31 is in tune with the radical demands of discipleship found especially in the section that narrates Jesus with his disciples journeying "on the way" to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52). Jesus' revelation about his suffering, death, and resurrection makes clear that discipleship is not about wealth and power, but rather renunciation, receptivity, service, and self-giving. Moreover, the fact that the disciples' positive portrayal is juxtaposed with the preceding story of the rich man who failed to accept Jesus' call to become a disciple demonstrates that renunciation of possessions and following Jesus are fundamental attitudes for true discipleship. Therefore, taking into consideration these observations, the picture of the disciples in Mark becomes more nuanced and even paradoxical, for it shows signs of misunderstanding and failures, but also important signs of positive response to Jesus' call and demands.

This study has also come to the conclusion that the story of the disciples in Mark finds its purpose and meaning in the relationship between the author, the text, and the audience. It is in this dialogue that the true meaning of discipleship is discovered and reveals its power. This is a task to be carried out not only by individual (silent) readers, in the modern sense, but also in the experience provided by the exercise of reading/listening and studying the Gospel of Mark in community.

It is noteworthy that the positive picture of disciples in Mark 10:23-31 has to do with *renunciation of possessions*. Today's followers of Jesus often neglect (or even dismiss) this important call and teaching of Jesus that is also attested to in the other NT writings. Therefore the proclamation of this "good news" is not only necessary; it is urgent. Since Mark presented his Gospel narrative as "*the beginning* of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (1:1), telling his audience the remarkable story of the disciples interwoven with the story of Jesus and the kingdom, today's followers of Jesus are invited to *continue* this Gospel story in their life, telling and re-telling this exciting narrative, not as something of the past, but as a good story that has the power to transform those who hear it.

To be sure, the author of Mark also provides other models of discipleship than the male disciples, especially during his passion when they are facing complete disaster. These characters are without doubt positive references to Mark's audience in every time and place. They are diversified: men and women, a worker from the field, a Roman centurion, women followers from Galilee, a follower just cured from blindness, an oppressed widow, and others. Perhaps they represent the varieties of followers of Jesus in Mark's first community. By their actions and presence during the passion of Jesus, they also serve to teach the audience of today.

Although the work presented in this thesis is somewhat initial and far from being conclusive, it hopes to be a voice in dialogue with other voices that are intrigued by the Markan story of the disciples of Jesus, and seeks to liberate its energy and power. Thus this study seeks to take part in the “republic of many equal voices,” which is described by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in the following terms:

... a “republic of many equal voices” is to see it [biblical studies] as a space for people to dialogue, debate, argue, and collaborate with each other, to seek not only to understand the diverse voices of biblical texts but also to explore, assess, and evaluate them in terms of their impact on contemporary publics and religious communities.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, since Jesus’ reply to the Peter (10:29-30) includes both *renunciation of possessions* and *family ties*, it will be important to explore more closely (perhaps in a future study) how these two aspects are related in the discipleship of Jesus both in Mark’s Gospel and in the setting of his community. Moreover, a study that compares Markan discipleship and the earlier letters of Paul could shed important light on the debate about discipleship in Christian origins. Considering that discipleship in Mark is an ever-challenging and dynamic experience, both the intellectual study of its concept and the actualization of its demands seem to be worthwhile enterprises that can lead to surprises and sufferings, but, above all, to life, making discipleship truly a “good news” of Jesus Christ for the world of yesterday and today.

---

<sup>134</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 88.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Bíblia de Jerusalém*, edited by José Bortolini. Rev. ed. São Paulo, SP: Paulus, 1998.

*Greek-English New Testament*, edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce M. Metzger. 7th rev. ed. Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981.

*The Greek New Testament*, edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce M. Metzger. 4th rev. ed. Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001.

*The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2008.

*The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, edited by Patrick H. Alexander, John F. Kutsko, James D. Ernest, Shirley Decker-Lucke and David L. Petersen. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999.

Achtemeier, Paul J. "And He Followed Him: Miracles and Discipleship in Mark 10:46-52." *Semeia* 11 (1978): 115-145.

Adam, Andrew K. M., Kurt Aland, John R. Bartlett, Timothy K. Beal, Klaus Berger, Robert F. Berkey, Mark E. Biddle, and Hendrikus Boer. *Methods of Biblical Interpretation: Excerpted from the Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John H. Hayes. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004.

Anderson, Janice C., Stephen D. Moore, Elizabeth S. Malbon, Robert M. Fowler, David M. Rhoads, Abraham Smith, and Tat-siong B. Liew. *Mark & Method: New Approaches in*

- Biblical Studies*, edited by Stephen D. Moore, Janice C. Anderson. 2nd ed. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Barton, Stephen C. *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*. Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Black, Carl C. *The Disciples According to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate*. Sheffield, England; JSOT Press, 1989.
- Best, Ernest. *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986.
- . "The Role of the Disciples in Mark." *New Testament Studies* 23 (1977): 377-401.
- CELAM - Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano. *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean - Concluding Document*. Bogotá, Colombia: Centro de Publicaciones del CELAM, 2008.
- Clarke, Andrew D. "'Do Not Judge Who is Worthy and Unworthy': Clement's Warning Not to Speculate about the Rich Young Man's Response (Mark 10.17-31)." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (2009): 447-468.
- Collins, Adela Yarbro. *Mark: A Commentary*. Hermeneia - a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, edited by Harold W. Attridge. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007.
- Crosby, Michael H., Neil Elliott, Katherine A. Grieb, and Richard A. Horsley. *The New Testament: Introducing the Way of Discipleship*, edited by Sharon H. Ringe, Wes Howard-Brook. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Culpepper, Alan R. *Mark*. Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publisher, 2007.
- Donahue, John R. "Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995): 1-26.

- . *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1983.
- . "A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 563-594.
- Donahue, John R. and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Mark*. Sacra Pagina, edited by Daniel J. Harrington. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Paternoster Press, 2002.
- Freeland, Chrystia. "The Rise of the New Global Elite." *The Atlantic Magazine*.  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2011/01/the-rise-of-the-new-global-elite/8343/>  
 (accessed 4/12/2011, 2011).
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. "The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ." *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 317-326.
- Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Sacra Pagina., edited by Daniel J. Harrington. Vol. 1. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007.
- . *What are They Saying about Mark?* New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 2004.
- Henderson, Suzanne W. *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Hengel, Martin. *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. Translated by James Greig, edited by John Riches. Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2005.
- Horsley, Richard A. *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.



Jackson, Derrick Z. "Surprise, Surprise: Rich Get Richer." *Boston Globe*.

[http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2011/04/12/surprise\\_surprise\\_rich\\_get\\_richer/](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2011/04/12/surprise_surprise_rich_get_richer/) (accessed 4/12/2011, 2011).

Kelber, Werner H., Richard A. Edwards, and Fernando F. Segovia. *Discipleship in the New Testament*, edited by Fernando F. Segovia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989.

Kraybill, Donald B. and Dennis M. Sweetland. "Possessions in Luke-Acts: A Sociological Perspective." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 10 (1983): 215-239.

Malbon, Elizabeth S. *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002.

———. *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009.

———. "Narrative Criticism - How Does the Story Mean?" In *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, edited by Stephen D. Moore and Janice C. Anderson. 2nd ed. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008.

———. "Text and Contexts: Interpreting the Disciples in Mark." *Semeia* 62 (1993): 81-102.

Marcus, Joel. "The Jewish War and the *Sitz Im Leben* of Mark." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 441-462.

Marshall, Christopher D. *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*. Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

May, David M. "Leaving and Receiving: A Social-Scientific Exegesis of Mark 10:29-31." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 17 (1990): 141-151.

- Metzger, M. Bruce. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994.
- Moloney, Francis J. *Beginning the Good News: A Narrative Approach*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995.
- . *Mark: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
- . *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.
- Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988.
- Perkins, Pheme. *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Shiner, Whitney T. *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003.
- . *Follow Me! Disciples in Markan Rhetoric*. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995.
- Suh, Joong S. *Discipleship and Community: Mark's Gospel in Sociological Perspective*. Claremont, Calif.: Center for Asian-American Ministries, 1991.
- Sweetland, Dennis M. *Mark: From Death to Life*. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2007.
- . *Our Journey with Jesus: Discipleship According to Mark*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987.
- Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1990.

———. "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role." *The Journal of Religion* 57 (1977): 386-405.

Taylor, Vincent. *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*. London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1963.

Tyson, Joseph B. "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961): 261-268.